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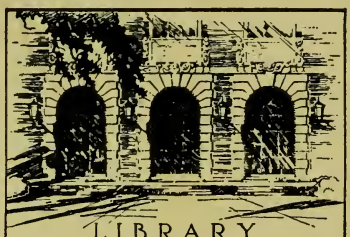

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# MY ELDEST BROTHER.

## A Tale.

By the Author of '*Our Farm of Four Acres*;' '*From Hay Time to Hopping*.'

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

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# MY ELDEST BROTHER.

## CHAPTER I.

To reach Baymouth, it was necessary to pass through London; and when we left home, two days after Maude had quitted us, it was our intention to accomplish the whole distance in one day. Unfortunately, the horse which took us to the station cast a shoe, and we were delayed more than half an hour before the driver could find a smith to replace it.

Owing to this accident, we were too late for the train by which we intended to reach town, in time to proceed to Baymouth. We, therefore, decided to remain till the morning at the hotel near the terminus, sending, as soon as we reached London,

a telegram to apprize our friends of our inability to be with them that night.

This delay was very vexatious; for, independent of the inconvenience it occasioned us, I dreaded the additional expense I was aware it would entail.

Before leaving home, I had made an estimate of the money we were likely to require during our absence: but when did such theoretical calculations ever prove correct?

We had not left home twelve hours, before I was aware of their fallacy; and it was with very unpleasant recollections of the state of the travelling purse, that I ascended the spacious, brilliantly-lighted staircase of the hotel, when we arrived in London.

The first thing was to secure rooms for the night, the second to answer the inquiries of the waiter relative to dinner.

We all stood in need of refreshment; indeed, I was very hungry, and the word dinner sounded pleasantly in my ears; but fearing it would be a piece of culpable extravagance to order it in such a place, I looked at my mother, and said—

"I think, mamma, you would prefer tea?"

To my great disappointment, she answered, "You must have some dinner, my dear." And, turning to the man, requested he would serve it as soon as possible.

He immediately placed a long paper in her hand, containing a list of the various dainties he could supply, and requested her to make a selection from it.

Without looking at it, she returned it to him, saying—

"We require a very simple dinner—anything you can let us have quickly will do."

The man looked, I thought, as he left the room, rather puzzled by the *carte blanche* given him.

Presently he returned, and commenced laying the cloth with great ceremony—I had never been in an hotel before, with the exception of the night we passed at the small country town when travelling to Brookfields with Esther—and I watched, with some curiosity, the solemn demeanour with which he performed his office. Each dinner napkin, I

believe, occupied his attention for five minutes, and several times he altered the arrangements of the forks and spoons he had placed, as I thought, with extreme exactness. When he came to the glasses, my amusement was converted into consternation; not only the ordinary wine glasses, but those for champagne and hock were placed.

Was it possible that we were expected to order such expensive wines? He would not, I thought, have brought the glasses if it was not customary to consume the wines they were intended to hold; and with the false shame common to all young people, I dreaded to act in any way contrary to established usage, and incur the contempt of our gentlemanly attendant by behaving differently to the persons who were in the habit of frequenting the hotel.

The dinner was served with a stately solemnity, which quite deprived me of appetite. Soup and fish both figured on the table, and when they were removed, mutton cutlets and chicken replaced them; a pheasant and tart winding up the entertainment.

"What wine will you take, madam?" was asked of my mother, as she took her seat at the table.

She looked a little perplexed, as she observed the formidable array of glasses which flanked her plate; and, looking at me, said—

"Shall we have a little sherry, Nelly?"

"If you please, mamma."

A "little sherry" was evidently a riddle to our attendant, but he solved it by bringing us a bottle—thinking, I concluded, that was little enough for three people.

I was heartily glad when the cloth, carefully brushed; fresh glasses placed, with the accompaniments of walnuts and grapes; and the wax-lights arranged in a satisfactory manner to the feelings of the waiter, he quitted the room, and left us alone for the first time since we had entered the house.

"I see, Nelly," said my mother, "that I was wrong to order dinner in such an expensive place; but I thought you required something more than tea after the fatigues of to-day: but it is no use lamenting it. Pour Martha out some wine, and take a little your-

self—it will do you good. Besides," she added, smiling, "you should drink it on principle, as we shall have to pay for it."

"Then you, too, mamma, must act on principle, and take a little with these fine grapes," answered I.

Delighted to find she did not appear fatigued or out of spirits, I ceased to regret we had been compelled to divide the journey. It was better for her, and the expense was one of those accidental ones which was not likely to occur again. Comforted by this reflection, I thought with less dismay of the bill which would be presented to us in the morning.

We did not leave the hotel till one o'clock the following day. Our breakfast was equally elaborate as our dinner, and our bill did not discredit the excellence of our fare. There was nothing to complain of in the charges. Good dinners, whether eaten or not, must be paid for, let them be served where they may. But as I returned the lightened purse to my pocket, it was with a sigh of regret at the thought that already more than half the sum

I had destined for our holiday expenses was gone.

The station, where we were to leave the train, was nearly eight miles from Baymouth; and when we reached it, we found Maude waiting for us, with the vehicle in which we were to be driven that distance. A "pony dog-cart" she called it, mounted on two high wheels, and into which nothing but my mother's reluctance to mortify Maude could have induced her to enter.

By the skilful management of the porter, aided by the young lady's knowledge of its capabilities, it was able to contain ourselves and the luggage; and when we were declared "all right" by the officiating porter, Maude took her seat by the side of my mother in the front, while Martha and I sat with our back to the horse, and clung with desperate tenacity to the side railing of the cart.

With a scientific smack of her long whip to the stout little cob which drew it, Maude started on the journey—the very first step of which nearly precipitated Martha on her face in the road.

"Oh! dear Miss Nelly!" exclaimed she, "do ask Miss Maude to stop and let me get down. I would rather walk twenty times over. Stop! pray stop!" shouted she, as a second jolt over the stones terrified her out of all propriety.

Maude, who had been too busy guiding her steed through the narrow streets of the little town to pay any attention to Martha's fears, now turned round, and telling her there was no danger if she would only sit still and "hold hard," proceeded to apologise to my mother for bringing such a conveyance.

"The fact is, my dear Mrs. Travers, I yesterday went to the station in a dignified manner. I borrowed farmer Hobbes's 'feayton,' as his lady calls it; but, unfortunately, to-day the horse is wanted to plough, so I was fain to get this concern from Mr. Sangster at the shop."

"But surely, my dear Maude," said my mother, "this is rather a strange vehicle for a lady to drive?"

"Well, I suppose it is; but then I thought you would sooner find me waiting for you

than Joe Sangster. And he assured me the cob was quite steady, and that 'he would warrant I should not come to grief.' An assurance which, I hope, will give you perfect confidence in my Jehuship."

It was very evident to me that my mother did not place much reliance on Joe Sangster's warranty. At all times timid in a carriage, the occasional jerks over the deep ruts we sometimes encountered, caused her to cling to Maude with a feeling of painful apprehension whenever an extra jolt gave notice of some perilous spot in the road.

"Pray, dear Mrs. Travers, do not be alarmed," said Maude, earnestly, after one of these occasional jerks; "there is not the slightest cause for it. This is what the country people call 'Squashmire Lane,' and well it deserves its title. But we are just out of it, and then the remainder of the distance is as level as a bowling-green."

I could see by the expression of my mother's face, that there was something which annoyed her besides the ride in the dog-cart. Residing for a great number of years in a

suburb of London where the conventional rules of society are strictly preserved, she was shocked at the perfect independence of Maude's conduct. For a young lady to drive such a carriage alone for several miles, and to talk familiarly of Joe Sangsters and bowling-greens, jarred against all her ideas of decorum.

Although of a most excitable and impulsive disposition, her long seclusion from the world, and the extreme quiet and order which had always prevailed in her home, had tinctured her manner with some appearance of formality, so that the sight of Maude's unrestrained glee at our arrival, and the exuberant spirits with which she laughed, talked, smacked her whip, and "gee upped" the cob, made her, for the time, extremely disgusted with that young lady.

All these offences, on the part of my friend, would not have prevented my enjoying the drive, had it not been for the symptoms of fatigue exhibited by my mother. The air was fresh and exhilarating, and blew directly from the sea; bringing with it that peculiar

odour which indicates the immediate vicinity of the ocean, and I gladly hailed this first intimation of our approach towards it.

"You like the smell of the kelp, do you, Nelly!" said Maude, in answer to some remark I had made respecting it. "I am glad of that, for you are likely to have enough of it for some days. The wind has thrown a quantity of it on the beach, and till the farmers cart it away, we have rather more 'smell of the sea,' as you call it, than is quite agreeable even to me. You will be glad to catch your first view of it, I dare say, and that will be when we have reached the top of yonder hill; when we are at the foot of it we are almost at home. The usual approach to Baymouth is not very pretty, and I have made rather a longer journey from the station than was necessary, in order that your first impressions of it might be favourable."

I was very sorry that her wish to exhibit her native place to the best advantage should have occasioned her to lengthen the distance, and would have been quite contented to have

entered it by the nearest way, even though its most beautiful aspect had been hidden from me till the morning.

Very slowly did the cob climb the steep chalk hill, from the summit of which we were to catch the first sight of our resting-place; but when we at last reached it, Maude pointed triumphantly, with her long whip, to the glorious prospect which, illumined by the various and glowing colours of an October sunset, was displayed to our admiring eyes. Well might a native of Baymouth be proud of introducing a stranger to it from that point of view.

The village on which we looked down appeared to consist of little more than the rude huts of the fishers, which were huddled in picturesque confusion round the base of the tall cliffs which stretched for miles along the coast. At the present moment the beach presented a scene of great activity. The tide was coming in, and the fishers were getting their boats ready for sea: every inhabitant of the huts appeared to be taking part in the preparations. Nets and lines were brought

from the houses, and thrown into the vessels; anchors were weighed, windlasses were worked, and sails hoisted with a celerity and quietness (owing to the distance from which we beheld it), that I could have imagined I was gazing on one of Stanfield's beautiful paintings, rather than an actual representation of a scene he had frequently depicted with such marvellous fidelity.

To add to the life and animation of the picture, men, horses, and carts were grouped on the sands, for the purpose of removing the kelp, with which they were covered; while children, of all ages, sometimes leapt into the boats—sometimes, with bare feet and legs, rushed some distance into the sparkling waves, laughing in gay defiance of the threats hurled at them by their angry mothers.

At some distance from the shore, I perceived the spire of the village church; while close beside it was the Parsonage, a low white cottage, with thatched roof, almost hidden from view by the tall trees which surrounded it. Further off, were scattered the homesteads of the wealthy farmers, who cultivated

the large tracts of country which, Maude informed us, had been but a few years reclaimed from the immense range of downs in the immediate vicinity.

"But where is your own house?" I inquired, after gazing in every direction for a few moments. "I do not see one that in the least resembles the description you have given me of it."

"That was my home," replied she, pointing with her whip in the direction of the Parsonage, "till the last two years. Now you must look nearer the sea for it, Nelly—try if you cannot discern it."

For some time I continued looking in the immediate vicinity of the village, but I could not discern any habitation which was likely to be the one for which I was seeking.

"It is no use, Nelly, groping with your eyes into those tall cliffs just beneath you. You do not 'even burn!' Enlarge your sphere of vision. We do not roost quite so lowly as you appear to imagine."

I followed the direction of her own looks as she spoke, and at the distance of about

half-a-mile from the huts of the fishers, beheld a large dismantled-looking building; which, from the spot where I viewed it, looked as if it was built of some kind of dark sparkling spar, so brightly did it glisten in the rays of the setting sun. It was situated close to the sea, and the waves appeared to dash against the high wall by which it was enclosed. So isolated was its appearance, that I exclaimed—

"Is that your home, Maude, that I see yonder? Is that the very haunted mansion in which we are to procure shelter in our adversity?"

"True, Nelly, that is the house I alluded to; and it is one in which we were thankful to take shelter ourselves. But it is quite large enough to accommodate you when you require to inhabit it, without in the least encroaching on our domain."

"What are you speaking of?" asked my mother, in some astonishment.

"Only of a romance I composed one day for Nelly's amusement, dear Mrs. Travers. But I must not keep you waiting longer in

the chill evening air—so gee-up, Dobbin!" And, smacking the whip over the back of the patient animal, she prepared to descend the steep hill. This proved a more difficult task for the poor steed than its ascent; and Maude was half frightened herself as he gave frequent indications of his wish to fall on his knees.

"Pray let us get out and walk down!" said my mother, pale with terror.

"You can't," said the driver; "it is utterly impossible I can stop him going down this hill—only sit quiet and don't be afraid, and we shall reach the bottom in safety. See, how tight I am holding him!"

She was as good as her word, and guided the horse safely to the bottom of the hill; but when once more on level ground, she drew a deep breath, and said—

"Thank God we have escaped with our necks unbroken! A thing I never anticipated when about half way down. But 'all's well that ends well.' We must let the cob rest a short time, and then drive quickly home."

Less than half an hour brought us to the haunted house, where we received an affectionate welcome from the lady who was waiting anxiously at the door for our arrival.

The years which had elapsed since my mother and Mrs. Headley had parted seemed to vanish from their memories, as they embraced each other with exclamations of affectionate recognition. So much were they occupied with their own feelings, that the latter did not, for some time, appear conscious of my presence; and as Maude had vanished with the dog-cart, it was with an unpleasant sensation of being wholly overlooked, that I waited till the emotion of the long-estranged friends had subsided. Then my mother called me to her side, and, putting my hand into Mrs. Headley's, said—

"Although I am happy in possessing five children, this is the only one who remains at home to solace me with her affection and duty. I suppose I need not say much respecting her; your daughter has, no doubt, furnished you with her character."

"Maude has prepared me to love you for

your own sake," said Mrs. Headley, embracing me, "even if I should not have done so for your mother's."

Very shortly, Maude returned; having, as I surmised, been to deliver her borrowed steed to its owner, "Joe Sangster." Approaching the sofa on which my mother was reclining, she said, gaily—

"Well, my dear Mrs. Travers, I hope you do not feel ill from the effects of your fright, although, I must confess, you had sufficient grounds for apprehension. Had the cob's foot slipped—as I sometimes feared—nothing could have saved us from destruction."

Mrs. Headley reproved her daughter severely for her rashness in returning by such a dangerous road; but the delinquent heard her with perfect unconcern.

"It will do Mrs. Travers no harm, mamma, now it is safely over; and she will sleep all the better for the little uneasiness she suffered, and which, I am sure, was more than compensated for by the beautiful scene she beheld from the top of 'Ghastsome Hill,' for that is the awful name bestowed on that spot

by the villagers. But here is Martha waiting to take her mistress up stairs, and I want to show Nelly her room, if she is ready to go with me."

I was not sorry to find, when I reached it, that it communicated with the one she occupied herself. Always accustomed to reside in comparatively modern dwellings, of moderate dimensions, I regarded with dismay the large, dreary-looking galleries we had traversed before we entered the warm, comfortable rooms we were now in, and which appeared as if they had been recently fitted for the occupation of their present inmates.

I expressed my satisfaction at being so near my friend, and asked her how it was she came to inhabit such an extensive but dilapidated mansion.

"We were compelled to do so by a stern task-mistress, Nelly, who owns the disagreeable name of 'Necessity.' Not long after my father's death, we were obliged to quit the Parsonage; and my mother, resisting all the entreaties of my brother and uncle, to remove from the village, made arrangements

to occupy rooms in a large farmhouse in the neighbourhood. Just before we removed into them, the owner of this place, who had been a pupil of my father's and affectionately attached to his memory, offered to make any portion of it habitable, for my mother's occupation, at a rent merely nominal.

"This was too tempting an offer to be rejected; and, in defiance of the advice of every soul in the parish, we removed into it as soon as the rooms we had selected were ready to receive us, and all the more readily, that the four months we were compelled to reside at farmer Brackfield's, convinced my mother of the impossibility of living without sleep after four o'clock in the morning. At first I was rather timid of moving about the old rookery after dusk—for, as I told you, it has the reputation of being haunted—but I soon conquered my folly; and now I should be sorry to exchange this home for any other that could be offered me, though there are some drawbacks to my pleasure which you will soon discover.

"But look!" and she went to the casement

and threw it open; "did I not tell you that the sea would dash almost against the window of your sleeping room. Hark now to the low murmur of the waves as they break gently over the sunken rocks which lie close to the foot of the wall! and then imagine how grand it must be to listen to them when, lashed by a furious wind, they cause every room to rock with the violence with which they are thrown against such an apparently feeble barrier as that wall affords."

"But are you not afraid, Maude, that in one of these grand storms, which seem to give you such delight, not only the wall, but the very house itself, may be swept away?"

"No, Nelly, it has stood the shock of too many tempests to give any ground for apprehension on that score; besides, unfortunately, the sea is beginning to recede from this part of the coast. You may rest secure, in the wildest night, that you will not be washed out of your bed by the 'yeasty waves.'"

"And who is the owner of this haunted

residence?" I asked. "And why has he suffered it to fall into such a state of decay?"

"I'll answer your last question first, Nelly. It was want of money, originally, which consigned the old house to ruin. Now it is the want of inclination to repair it which condemns it to remain as it is.

"Years back the owners of it could stand on the summit of the hill we descended today, and call themselves lords of all the land they could discern from it. Its present master has not a rood to boast of; woods and streams, broad lands and noble parks, have all passed to others, and no memorial of their former greatness remains in the vicinity but this wreck of their ancient home.

"Three years ago its present possessor inherited from a maternal relative a valuable estate in another and distant county. As I have told you, he was educated at the Parsonage, and from always living in the place, it was his ardent wish to regain some part of the land, and once more establish his home in the place where his forefathers had exercised despotic sway. But innumerable

difficulties stood in his path. The land was the property of various holders; and he soon discovered the impossibility of reuniting it. So he abandoned the old house to its fate, and resolved to banish from his thoughts the hope of being the lord of Baymouth Manor. Quite a romance is it not, Nelly?"

And Maude, who had hitherto remained standing by the casement, withdrew from it, and began to busy herself in arranging the contents of my boxes in the large old-fashioned press which occupied one side of the apartment.

"But you have not told me the name of this descendant of a hundred knights. Did his original one depart from him when he became the owner of the property you mentioned, or does his designation still recall the remembrance of the power his family once possessed in Baymouth?"

"His name, like his possessions, belongs to a more recent period. He is known in the world as Mr. Stainton, but many of the old people here still call him by that he bore amongst them when a boy. His father always

resided for some months of the year in this old place, and thus the connexion between the family and the inhabitants of the hamlet was never wholly broken off. And now, Nelly, if you ask another question concerning my hero, I shall imagine you are anxious to finish the romance, of which I once furnished you the outlines, in the manner I indicated."

## CHAPTER II.

THE next morning I was awakened at the first glimpse of dawn by Maude, who insisted on my rising and going to the window, for the purpose of witnessing the sun rise.

"Make haste!" she cried, impatiently: "you will lose the first of the most glorious sight you ever beheld in your life. For what do you inland people know of such a gorgeous spectacle as this? Look! how the gold is already blending with the dusky gray, and how that in turn gives place to the glowing red! Own that you never did see the sun rise before."

Since the memorable hours I had passed by the bedside of my dying father, I had been peculiarly susceptible of the cold, dreary

feeling which all persons experience at the approach of day, when either from sickness or anxiety they have watched through the long hours of the night. I never awakened at this particular time without a shuddering consciousness of its approach.

Maude was unable to account for the emotion I exhibited, as I stood gazing from the window by her side, and as briefly as possible I answered her inquiries concerning it. I did not receive much sympathy in return for my confidence, for she answered—

"I really cannot comprehend such morbid feelings as your mother and yourself frequently display. You have indulged and humoured them so long, that when you come to mix in the world of working-day people, you are always getting them wounded by your contact with those who have to battle with the present instead of mourning over the past. I know that Mrs. Travers was horrified by what she considered my most improper conduct yesterday, but, Nelly, I am not the hoyden she conceives me; it was all done for a purpose. I wished to shock her prejudices,

and pave the way for the many knocks they must receive before she returns to Brookfields. God has given her, in common with every human being, duties to perform, and it is both cowardly and selfish to evade them. For a long time past she has thought she 'had reason to be fond of grief;' and, as for you, it is, I must tell you, very far from true affection for your father's memory that gives rise to such false sentiments as you are now indulging in. It is not in human nature to see those we love taken from us by death, and not mourn their loss; that 'Jesus wept' at the tomb of Lazarus is a proof how graciously our human sympathies are regarded, but the blessed words which followed this evidence of our Saviour's humanity teach us that the grave is only the passport to eternal life, and that the same voice which said, 'Lazaraus come forth,' will bid the righteous enter into the kingdom prepared for them from the foundation of the world. Oh! Nelly, I have stood by many death-beds, and have seen the awful hour of dissolution, met sometimes in fear, sometimes in despair,

but, blessed be God, most frequently in the humble hope that through the blood of the Redeemer they were ransomed from all sin in the sight of their heavenly Father, and at such moments have I said in my heart, 'it is good for me to be here,' and have prayed, like the prophet of old, that I, too, might die the death of the righteous, and that my latter end might be like his."

I could hardly credit it was the lively, careless Maude, who was speaking, as she poured forth with startling energy the words I have penned; but in a few moments she had regained her usual manner, and said, with a gay smile,

"Don't be frightened at my vehemence, my dear; it is not often I lift the veil which conceals thoughts I do not care to parade in my everyday life. Now let us have a walk on the beach till your mother and mine are ready for breakfast. To tell the truth, I half dread to meet the former, after my lesson of yesterday; I should be deeply grieved if it proved too rough a one, and that I have offended past forgiveness. I intend to take

you from her for the whole day, and leave her to be instructed practically by my dear mother; you need not fear, she will prove an indulgent teacher."

Not only that day, but several succeeding ones, did Maude insist on my accompanying her in her rambles. Under her guidance I soon became almost as fearless as herself in climbing to the top of the highest cliffs, in remaining on the beach when the tide was coming in, till we sometimes appeared in danger of being carried away by the waves, as they rolled back from the sands, which they were almost imperceptibly concealing more and more from our view. With her I had visited the cottages of the brave men who daily risked their lives in order to procure bread for their wives and little ones. I listened with interest to the tales of the many perils they had passed through in the course of their adventurous career, and won, by trifling gifts to the children, the privilege of being welcomed with manifest delight, whenever we made our appearance in the vicinity of their dwellings. I learned to love the sea

in all its aspects, and conquered my fears so far as to accompany Maude in the boating excursions she delighted in, with only one of her old pensioners, a weather-beaten triton, who was minus a leg, as pilot and captain of our vessel.

My mother, under the judicious rule of Mrs. Headley, was leading as healthy if not as animated an existence as my own. At first there was some little difficulty in persuading her to enter the houses of the poor invalids whom her friend regarded as her especial charge. She had never seen distress or pain out of her own immediate circle, and it was with great reluctance she first listened to recitals to which Mrs. Headley gave her patient attention.

Gradually her feelings became interested in behalf of those whom God had afflicted, even as she herself had been afflicted. She found many widows, who, while they mourned the death of affectionate husbands, lived in constant suspense as to the fate of their absent children; many mothers who sorrowed over the sinful lives of their sons, and who

laboured zealously to procure bread for those who, from sickness or tender years, were still dependent on their exertions.

My mother was not a woman to close her eyes to the light, when satisfied it "was the day spring from on high" which shone on her. Convinced of the grievous error she had committed, in rebelling against God's will, she became anxious to atone for the past by patient submission for the future. Nor was it only in theory she manifested her repentance. Every day, attended by Martha, she visited those who stood in need of assistance, and while, with a hand too liberal for her straightened means, she relieved their bodily distresses, she endeavoured humbly to teach the lessons she had only lately acquired herself.

It was not till I was on the point of leaving Baymouth I discovered this change in my mother's habits. Neither Mrs. Headley nor Martha ever alluded to the manner in which she spent the hours I was absent from her. Satisfied and happy to see her more cheerful in spirit and better in health than when she

left home, I had never thought of inquiring how such desirable results were obtained. I only thought, with regret, that when removed from the congenial companionship of Mrs. Headley, she would probably sink back into the habitual invalid and apprehensive mother.

I thought often, during my visit at Baymouth, of Mrs. Locksley and her father. No results had followed the insertion of the advertisements respecting her daughter, and the old man, Mrs. Hurst informed me, grew daily more harsh to his daughter, and more anxiously to desire the return of his grandchild. In one of her letters, she said,

"Indeed, Nelly, if Hannah is not soon discovered, I think it probable he will constitute you the heiress of his well filled money-bags; he asks constantly for you, and expresses the most earnest wishes for your speedy return. I need hardly say how much your presence is desired by your friends here. Come home soon, or we shall begin to fear we have lost you altogether, and that supposition will give pain to more than your true friend—JANE HURST."

Though sorry the farmer should grieve for the absence of his granddaughter, I yet felt a sense of relief in knowing I was not likely to encounter her who would forcibly recall to my recollection the suffering I had experienced through one she so much resembled, and now all that had passed "was as a dream that is told." I was glad to escape beholding her who must have awakened painful memories in my heart.

When we arrived at Baymouth, in October, we intended that our visit should not exceed a month's duration. That time had gone by, and still there was no period fixed for our leaving it. Mrs. Headley had been earnest in her entreaties for us to remain longer, and my mother was evidently so much benefitted by the change, that I was very glad she consented to stay some time longer with our friends. Maude, too, was very earnest with me on the subject.

"Unless you are tired of us, Nelly, why return to Brookfields at the very worst part of the year? November is the month when the country is really unendurable. The fall-

ing leaves, which lie saturated by the heavy dews on the ground, and render walking almost impossible, the dismal soughing of the wind amongst the bare branches of the trees, the fogs which hang like heavy clouds over the earth, and for days together obscure the light of the sun, the chill, miserable, damp look and feeling which prevails everywhere, both inside and outside the house, constitute altogether an amount of wretchedness which I wonder any one should willingly endure. How different is it here, where the sun shines as brilliantly as in June, and where no mementos, in the shape of leafless trees, muddy roads, and stifling fogs, remind us that winter is at hand!"

"I should think the heavy gales which sweep along the coast in November, must be warnings that summer is past, even if you had no other indications of the fact," replied I.

"Not a bit; I have known the wind quite as boisterous in August as it was last night. Own, Nelly, how frightened you were, 'when the sea and wind were contending which was

the mightiest.' If you do not succeed in inducing Mrs. Travers to remain, I shall think it is cowardice which drives you away."

This conversation took place the morning after a terrific gale, of which no evidence could be traced as we gazed from the top of Maude's favourite cliff at the waves which sparkled and danced in the brilliant sunshine. The weather had been threatening for some days previously, and the prudent fishers had not ventured to put to sea; but that morning not a boat was to be discerned on the beach. The tide was out, and the children were playing on the sands, or searching for crabs amidst the sunken rocks, while the mothers stood sunning themselves at the doors of their cottages, gossiping with each other.

It was a bright and cheerful scene, and I readily acknowledged its superiority at that season of the year to Brookfields.

"I am contented with that admission," said Maude; "you will stay after that, I am certain. And now let us walk over the cliffs, and recruit ourselves with a stock of polite-

ness from the inexhaustible supply of Mrs. Hobbes."

Mrs. Hobbes was the wife of a farmer who resided about two miles from Baymouth Church. Originally a labourer on the farm he now owned, his prosperity had not altered the natural kindliness of his disposition, or caused him to feel ashamed of the humble rank from which he had risen. His wife, who, before her marriage, had lived several years with Mrs. Headley as cook, was a very different character. It was from an uncle of hers, who had died in Australia, that the ample fortune they now possessed was derived, and she took care every one should be aware of that important circumstance.

Shortly after they received intelligence of the money bequeathed to them, the owner of the "Down Farm" wished to dispose of it, and John Hobbes, his former carter, became the purchaser. If John ever had indulged in dreams of earthly felicity, they certainly would have been limited by such a boundary as this. To be master of that substantial dwelling and those wide acres, to command

his former fellows, and be the proud possessor of the magnificent furniture in the drawing-room, which once during his servitude had dazzled his astonished eyes, as he assisted one of the house servants in carrying some heavy article up the stairs, was altogether such a vision of grandeur, that the wonder was the honest man's head was not completely turned by his unexpected prosperity. Thanks to a kind heart and a somewhat phlegmatic temperament, he bore his blushing honours very meekly, and was quite contented to let the burthen of maintaining their newly-acquired gentility rest on the willing and able shoulders of his wife, while he, to her great indignation, trudged over his fields in what she called "the hail fellow well met" style, with his former comrades, not one of whom would he consent to discharge. Moreover, he insisted on taking his meals with them in the kitchen, where, unrestrained by the presence of his wife—who, though very ostentatious, was inclined to parsimonious housekeeping—he allowed his hungry dependants an unlimited supply of pickled pork and cheese

with their breakfasts and suppers, dainties which, Maude informed me, were usually partaken of together, whenever the liberality of the farmers permitted such an indulgence.

The kind-hearted owner of the "Down Farm" was, when I made his acquaintance, about fifty years of age, short, stout, and ruddy. No persuasions of his wife could induce him to abandon the smock frock for his daily wear, though in compliance with her entreaties he arrayed himself in a suit of shining black on the Sabbath. When dressed in this appropriate costume, he was, to his own great discomfort, compelled to do penance for the evening in the sacred drawing-room, where he was strictly prohibited from smoking his evening pipe.

The necessity of complying with his wife's commands on the day of rest was one great drawback to the honest man's felicity, and that he had no son to succeed him in the management of the farm, and the fear that his two daughters were being educated in a fashion which might teach them to despise their father, were likewise causes for uneasi-

ness to the worthy farmer, and mingled some drops of bitterness in his otherwise pleasant cup of life.

Mrs. Hobbes, who must always have possessed ambitious ideas, more particularly on the subjects of education and etiquette, was no sooner settled as mistress of the farm, than she looked out for a governess for her daughters, girls of the ages of ten and twelve. She was fortunate enough to secure "a perfect treasure," through the medium of an advertisement she inserted in the county paper, and in which it was strictly enjoined "none should apply who had not lived in families of the highest distinction."

Miss Arabella Meredith was the name of the fortunate candidate who obtained the appointment, and who answered the inquiries of Mrs. Hobbes respecting her antecedents, by stating she had resided for some years in the family of a foreign nobleman, as governess and companion to his daughters.

As the young lady was very smartly dressed, and made some difficulty of accepting a situation in an untitled family, Mrs.

Hobbes was duly impressed with her importance, and eager to secure her services at the extravagant salary she demanded, on the condition that she should give lessons to herself as well as her daughters; and to the intense disgust of her unlettered husband, she passed hours every day in receiving instruction from her accomplished governess.

According to Maude's statement, Miss Meredith was by no means deficient in ability. She had apparently been tolerably well educated, and though far from a skilful musician, could play on the "bran new" piano in a style which excited the emulation of her employer to such a degree that she spent hours daily in endeavouring to acquire the art of performing "In my cottage," and "Liebeer Augustan." After some months, however, she discovered that proverbs were not always to be depended on, and that certainly the one which asserted "you were never too old to learn," was one of these.

But although obliged to abandon this particular accomplishment, Mrs. Hobbes managed to wonderfully improve her general demeanour

by copying faithfully the genteel deportment of Miss Arabella Meredith, and dressed, walked, and spoke as nearly as possible like her model, who for more than two years ruled despotically at the Down Farm. At the expiration of that period she received a letter from the countess with whom she had formerly resided, which related, in heartrending language, the death of the count, and the loss of all their property through the villany of his brother, who had usurped the title and estates of her son, both of which they could recover if furnished with a few paltry hundreds.

Moved by the distress that intelligence occasioned the devoted friend of the injured family, and impressed by the hints artfully thrown out, Mrs. Hobbes resolved to acquire the affection and gratitude of the illustrious foreigners by supplying them with the funds they required for the recovery of their fortune, and accordingly three days after the arrival of the letter, Miss Meredith departed from the farm for a month's holiday, provided with five hundred pounds for the relief of her

friends, together with a pressing invitation that they would honour the donor of that sum by passing some months at her residence as soon as their affairs would allow them to visit England.

More than five years had flown since the devoted Miss Meredith had quitted the farm on her friendly mission, but not one word concerning her had reached the anxious ears of Mrs. Hobbes, who still lived in expectation of her return. She had not attempted to supply her place in the family, and till she did reappear, Bessie and Nancy Hobbes were sent to an expensive school in the neighbourhood of London.

All the particulars of this family history I had received from Maude, to whom Mrs. Hobbes presented plenty of amusement. It was curious to see the mixture of familiarity and respect with which the newly-enriched lady treated the daughter of her former mistress.

On this particular morning we found her looking very elated and very perplexed, and she received us with even more than her usual elaborate politeness.

"I am exceedingly gratified, young ladies, by the honour of your visit this morning; there are so few in this secluded locality who can appreciate a mother's feelings on receiving such a letter as this"—and she pointed to one which laid on a table by her side—"that I am happy beyond measure at your being the first to whom I have the opportunity of showing this proof of my eldest daughter's advancement in her studies; the French, you will observe, is perfect both in its purity and its sentiment. I am sorry to say that beautiful as it is, I am unable to convey its full meaning to Mr. Hobbes; he insists on my writing it out for him in English, but as, unfortunately, yesterday I ran a thorn in my hand, I am unable to comply with his request."

"You can read it to him just as well, Mrs. Hobbes," said Maude, with great difficulty repressing her mirth, "translating it, you know, as you go on."

Mrs. Hobbes looked rather blank at the answer she received to her indirect petition for

a translation of the letter, but still she was not defeated, for she replied :

"Very true, Miss Headley, but my husband is extremely obstinate, and he says he wants to read his girl's letter himself, so if you will not think it too much trouble to oblige me, you will find writing materials on this Davenport."

Now Maude never would consent to humour her former servant, by assenting to her absurd pretensions to knowledge, so she replied :

"If your husband wishes to read his children's letters, don't you think it would be the best plan to desire them to write in a language their parents understand ; you know I am aware of your inability to read a line of this, and how anxious you are to learn its contents. If you will honestly say so, I will translate it ; not otherwise."

Mrs. Hobbes coloured highly at this rebuke, given, I thought, rather too harshly ; to my surprise, however, it was received meekly, and had the effect of bringing the lady down

from her height of polite urbanity to the level of her ordinary manner.

"Well, Miss Maude, I needn't tell you I don't understand it, for as you say, you know I can't read it; but I should be sorry they should think at the school that my girls have not got as good a lady for a mother as any of 'em, so I insist they shall send me a French letter once a quarter, that I may see how they get on. Ah! if my dear Miss Meredith would but come back, she would soon learn me French enough to make 'em out. What a sad loss she was to me in every way to be sure!"

Maude was busily occupied at the Davenport in translating the letter, and luckily for Mrs. Hobbes did not hear her lament for the absent Arabella; it was a subject on which she never spared the foolish woman, while to her great delight I listened patiently to her encomiums on the truant governess.

While conversing with me she resumed her correct orthography:

"I am sorry, Miss Travers, to hear you will soon leave us; I hoped you would have

been here when my daughters returned home for the vacation. Unfortunately, there are no young people in the neighbourhood fit for them to associate with, and on that account I am compelled to decline all intercourse with the surrounding families. I believe I am called the proudest lady in the vicinity, but, indeed, I am not so; for myself I should not object to occasionally meet some of the people, but I must remember that my daughters are of an age which forbids my allowing them to form companionships in a sphere lower than that in which their own lot is placed by Providence; but I should have been very glad to have made you known to them."

Here Mrs. Hobbes was relieved from what Maude called her "dictionary recitations," by having her attention claimed by that young lady, who presented her with the translation of the French letter she had made for the benefit of the unsophisticated father, but Mrs. Hobbes was not, apparently, a very quick decipherer of "written hand," as she termed it, and requested it might be read aloud, a request immediately complied with.

"My beloved papa and mamma—You will, I earnestly hope, be pleased with this proof of the progress I have made in acquiring a knowledge of the French language, and trust you will regard it as an evidence of my ardent desire to profit by the opportunities you have offered me of studying it under the careful tuition of Madame Deprez.

"I am happy also to inform you that my instructors in music and drawing are satisfied with the attention I bestow on those branches of my education, and that Miss Wickham is equally pleased with my advancement in English composition, elocution, and the numerous other studies which occupy every moment of my time.

"In the hope that my anxious endeavours to earn your approbation may prove successful, I have the honour and pleasure of signing myself,

"My dear papa and mamma,

"Your most affectionate and
grateful daughter,
"Eliza Hobbes."

"What a charming artless composition!" exclaimed the enraptured mother, when Maude had concluded; "how can I thank you, my dear Miss Headley, for rendering it so faithfully for her papa—and me," she added hastily, as she saw the translator look at her with laughing eyes.

"It is well you said that, Mrs. Hobbes, or I would have thrown my copy behind the fire, and left you nothing but your memory to rely on for the solution of this French mystery, and I fear one lesson would not have made you very perfect."

"It's no use trying to be genteel with you, Miss Maude," said the mortified lady.

"Not a bit," was the answer; "you may study 'The Complete Letter Writer,' and 'How to read, write, and speak correctly,' by night as well as day, Mrs. Hobbes, and I shall not feel one atom more respect for you. I wonder you are not tired of walking on stilts—much better to tread the ground firmly like your husband."

The researches of Mrs. Hobbes after knowledge had not apparently led her into the

realms of metaphor, for she did not in the least understand Maude's allusion, but looked down at her sandaled slippers, as if she thought in polite language they must be the articles mentioned, and that her visitor was advising her to adopt the hobnails of her husband.

"How is it possible," I inquired of Maude, as we walked home, still laughing at the perplexity in which we had left Mrs. Hobbes, "that she can contrive to express herself sometimes correctly, when it is evident her ordinary language is very different?"

"She does nothing but read novels, and study the dictionary, Nelly; and she learns by heart many of the speeches out of the first, which she thinks she can introduce appropriately. You must have observed that if her language is tolerably correct, it is delivered in a stiff, deliberate manner, as if she was fearful of omitting a word. She must have studied the speech in which she introduced that letter well, knowing she would have to ask me to translate it. As to the one with which she regaled you respect-

ing her regret at her daughters being unable to meet with suitable companions in Baymouth, I have heard it a dozen times word for word. I shall tell her she must get up a new one."

## CHAPTER III.

A FEW days after my mother had yielded to the entreaties of her friend to remain some time longer at Baymouth, Mrs. Headley received a letter from her brother, proffering a visit, and appointing the following day for his arrival.

"And Cuthbert is to be with us in a few days," cried Maude, joyfully; "I declare I shall feel quite proud of having our mansion so well filled. I think I shall make out a list of the distinguished guests who are staying at Baymouth House, and send it to the *County Chronicle*. It will look quite aristocratic more particularly if, as I suppose will be the case, Louis comes with my brother."

"Who is Louis?" asked I, astonished, at

hearing Maude speak in such familiar terms of one whose name I had never heard before.

"A friend of Cuthbert's, Nelly; and now we shall be able to ride over the cliffs to Durnham, and see the heronry there. Cuthbert generally contrives to borrow horses when he is here, although I have never been so far. As for my uncle, he likes a nice easy canter as well as any of us."

"And does Louis ride?" asked I, with a pardonable curiosity to know something concerning this hitherto unknown friend of Maude's.

"Wait till he comes to satisfy your curiosity concerning him, my dear, and in the meantime form your own ideal of the unknown."

"But," said my mother, "will not our remaining here interfere with your arrangements respecting your new guests?"

"Not at all," answered Maude; "there is plenty of room in this old place quite ready for the reception of visitors."

Notwithstanding this assurance, I soon became aware that a most unusual bustle

prevailed in the usual quiet household. Some rooms on the floor immediately under those occupied by Mrs. Headley were unclosed, and I discovered with surprise that they were much more expensively fitted up than any other portion of the house I had previously seen. They consisted of a sitting-room and two sleeping apartments, communicating with each other, and furnished both luxuriously and elegantly. The walls of the sitting-room were covered on three sides with beautiful water-colour drawings, while a large old-fashioned carved bookcase occupied the other. This was filled with the works of the best modern authors, and as I read the titles of the volumes Maude had concealed from me, I thought her a little deficient in good nature in hiding such treasures from my knowledge. Some among them, she had heard me express a wish to read, and she had regretted when I did, that it was impossible to procure them till her brother returned to London.

Cuthbert Headley had spent the long vacation on the Continent, and now was coming home for the short period which remained of

it, when it was concluded he would again become immersed in the duties of his profession.

Was it possible, I thought, that these rooms, so much superior to any others I had seen, could be kept exclusively for his use? If so, he could very little deserve the encomiums both mother and sister lavished on his affectionate and unselfish character.

While still gazing at the contents of the bookcase, Matty, the old servant of Mrs. Headly, entered with dusters and brushes, evidently for the purpose of arranging the rooms.

"Pray don't hurry away, miss," said she, as I prepared to depart; "I can go into the bedrooms first. There is the key of the bookcase," pointing to one which hung on a nail by the side. Mr. Louis always leaves it there for Miss Maude, though she will never touch one of them when he is away."

At this moment Maude entered. Ashamed of being detected where it was evident I had no right to be, I stammered out some excuse for my intrusion, but was stopped by my friend before I had uttered many words.

"So Nelly," she said gaily, "you have found your way like Fatima, into the blue chamber, but I can assure you the owner of it does not in the least resemble Bluebeard. Now, don't blush and stammer about it, the doors were open, and you were quite at liberty to enter. Now, can you not guess who is the fairy prince who shuts himself up for weeks now and then, in his enchanted castle?"

"I suppose, Maude, they must belong to the Louis of whom you spoke?"

"Quite right, my dear; they belong to Louis Stainton, the best and oldest friend Cuthbert possesses in the world. The only acknowledgment he will receive for our residence here, is that he may occasionally be allowed to occupy them when my brother is at home. They are never entered when he is absent, except by Matty, who has the charge of them. Now you will soon have the opportunity of forming your opinion of this hero. For my own part, I consider him a very commonplace sort of person."

When Mr. Lancester arrived the following

day, he was welcomed all the more gladly by my mother and myself, that he brought us a letter received that morning from Gerald, and which contained the most satisfactory news of my sister. She was, according to the report of her husband, looking so lovely, now that health had restored the exquisite complexion he remembered her to possess as a girl, that wherever she appeared, the epithet of the "beautiful" Englishwoman was bestowed on her. They intended to return in the following May, when Gerald was to devote himself zealously to his profession.

"I feel," he wrote, "as if this long and delightful holiday had rendered me disinclined for work, but I hope when brought into actual contact with my duty, I shall be able to overcome my laziness, and take as keen an interest as formerly in my profession."

My mother and Mr. Lancester did not agree very well respecting the future of their children. He insisted that Gerald should commence his career as a consulting surgeon in London, while my mother contended that

Esther would never be able to reside constantly there.

"Pooh! pooh! my dear friend," was the gentleman's rejoinder to this declaration. "I never knew a wife who really loved her husband, who could not live wherever that husband considered it necessary to fix his abode; besides, Esther can come to me at Streatham whenever she requires change, and that is near enough town to admit of Gerald's being sometimes with her."

"Esther can be with me at Streatham," said my mother hastily. "I suppose we shall be settled there before she returns to England."

Mr. Lancester made no reply to this remark, but abruptly rising from his chair, said, "Nelly, will you walk with me to the top of the west cliff to see the sunset?"

I felt directly that he had some communication to make, which I was to know before he acquainted my mother with it, and prepared directly to accompany him.

"You are quick witted, Nelly," said he, as half an hour afterwards we stood on the

top of the cliff, and beheld the autumnal sun descend in unclouded glory to the ocean. "Magnificent as is this sight, I should not have brought you to witness it this evening, had it not been necessary to tell you something apart from your mother. You will, I fear, find it difficult to reconcile her to a hard necessity, although you will, I am sure, own I have acted for her advantage in all things that I have done. I fear she will not be pleased to learn I have let her house at Streatham for five years."

"Let the house without consulting my mother!" said I, in amazement. "Oh! Mr. Lancester, you should never have done that."

"I have done so, Nelly; and you must inform her of the fact—you must not shrink from a painful duty. Is it not better this step is taken before she was hopelessly involved in difficulties? I have found an excellent tenant for the house, at a rental of two hundred and fifty pounds yearly. As you pay only one hundred for that at Brookfields, there is a clear saving of one hundred and fifty pounds. If you add to that the gardener's wages, and

the numerous other expenses attending it, we shall bring your income nearly to its original amount; and if your mother will only be firm in refusing to advance further sums to Henry, there is no reason why Edmund should not remain in Hanover for two years longer, and then return to England to prepare for one of the Universities. Now own, Nelly, that if to obtain a great good, I have done a little wrong, your mother ought not to be very implacable towards me."

I told him I did not doubt he had acted in all respects for her interest, but I could not conceal from him my apprehensions as to the manner in which she would receive such unexpected intelligence. To persons who have no associations disconnected with their home and the dear familiar faces which surround them in it, every article it contains are memorials of some event which has occasioned either pleasure or pain to the possessor. My mother was more than usually liable to such impressions, and, from the time of my father's death, had regarded as sacred relics all that he had valued. The pictures

he liked to gaze on, the books he delighted to read, the many elegant and artistic objects which his correct taste, and love for herself, had accumulated in every room—the very furniture, old-fashioned as it might be considered by others, was dear to her, for it reminded her of the love and pride with which he had prepared the home for her reception; and now, for strangers to profane with careless hands these household treasures, that they might be laughed at, and ridiculed, as antiquated and useless lumber by others, would, I was sure, render the enforced separation from her home still more painful.

I carried this difficulty, as I did all others, to Martha, and, by her advice, I deferred till the morning the task of acquainting my mother with what had taken place. "I always like bad news," said this sage counsellor, "to be told in the light of the morning; the long, dark hours of the night make it seem ten times blacker than it really is. Come to her room before you go down to breakfast, and we shall, I hope, find her bear the news better than you think."

To my great delight I found, on entering my mother's room the next morning, that Martha had forestalled my communication, and that it had been received with much more composure than I could have hoped for. She assured me she did not regret the steps which Mr. Lancester had taken for her benefit, and that if by her own folly she had created difficulties, she must expect to pay some penalty in order to be extricated from them.

"I only hope, Nelly," and her lip quivered as she spoke, "that the masters of our old house for the next five years will not greatly alter its arrangement, and that if I should live to re-enter it, I may be able to recognize the home left me by your father. And now, Nelly, adieu to the past—I will look only to the future; while you, my child, may live happy in the present."

Now that the trial was over, I felt how deeply we were indebted to Mr. Lancester for cutting the knot of our difficulties, and placing us again in peaceful security. Now I could think of Brookfields as home; five years was

a limit to which I was well content to bind my future hopes and wishes.

In the afternoon of this day I went with Maude and her uncle to the village, and as we were returning on the sands, we were overtaken by two gentlemen, who, from the delight with which they were welcomed by my friends, were evidently the guests who were expected later in the day. I lingered behind, while warm expressions of delight and surprize were exchanged between the party, and then becoming a little *piqued* that I was so completely forgotten by Maude, I retraced my steps to the village, resolved to return alone by another and more distant path.

I had accomplished more than half the journey, when I heard footsteps behind me; as it was now becoming rapidly dark, I became alarmed at the prospect of being, perhaps, accosted by a stranger, and quickened my pace till it fairly became a run; but my apprehensions were soon dispelled by the words of my pursuer.

"Let me entreat you not to be alarmed,

Miss Travers; I am sent by Maude to see you safely home."

Ashamed of my silly fears, I could only, when the stranger joined me, stammer out some awkward explanation for leaving my friends, and regret that Maude should have considered it requisite to trouble him to seek me.

Vexed with myself for my folly, I made no reply to the polite assurance of my attendant that Maude had conferred a favour by sending him in pursuit of me. But he was not disposed to remain silent, although I was.

"I did not expect that my first interview with Miss Travers would prove such a formal one; I had learned to know her so intimately through Maude's letters, that I ventured to hope I should be received as a friend at our first meeting."

"And so you are," answered I, extending my hand; "only I am vexed that Maude should have given you such unnecessary trouble. Mrs. Headley must be impatiently expecting you, and will have reason to

reproach me for deferring her pleasure in welcoming you."

I could not long treat Maude's brother as a stranger, and we were laughing and talking as unrestrainedly as if we were old friends, by the time we arrived at home.

I found Maude in my room awaiting me.

"Well, Nelly," exclaimed she, gaily, "I hope my messenger arrived in time to protect the errant damsel from any perilous adventure. What could have induced you to think of returning over the cliffs so late in the afternoon?"

"I thought I should be an intruder on your family party, and am really very sorry you should have given your brother the task of seeking me."

"Oh! never mind Cuthbert; don't think anything of his trouble, pray. I suppose it was hardly light enough for you to give me any opinion on his appearance, and if it was, I can't stay to hear it; for if you do not make haste, my dear, with that hair you are twisting about so curiously, you will keep my uncle waiting for his dinner, and that is an

unpardonable offence with all elderly gentlemen blessed with good appetites."

When I entered the drawing-room, I perceived that my mother was conversing cheerfully with Mr. Lancester, who was seated by her. Mrs. Headley was standing in one of the deep recesses of the window talking with a tall, dark young man, while a gentleman, whom I recognized as my companion over the cliffs, was engaged with Maude in looking at some new books which lay on the table. When I entered, he advanced towards me, and said, "I hope Miss Travers will pardon the clumsy manner in which I obeyed your commands this afternoon, Maude. I made such a noise as I approached her, that I do not wonder she fled in alarm."

"Miss Travers has complained of nothing but the trouble I gave my brother on her account. Come forward, Cuthbert, and assure this young lady she is not indebted to your gallantry this afternoon."

The gentleman who was conversing with Mrs. Headley came towards us at Maude's words.

"Miss Travers will acquit me, I hope, of wilfully neglecting the opportunity of serving her; but my sister's arbitrary commands compelled me to return home with my uncle and herself, while she entrusted to Mr. Stainton the privilege of seeking her friend."

"Well, now that you have finished that very correct speech, Cuthbert, perhaps you will have the goodness to hold your tongue for a short time, while I introduce Louis to Miss Travers."

"Not the slightest occasion for such a proceeding," said that gentleman, "I introduced myself in a very proper and satisfactory manner, I hope, to Miss Travers; and I think she will allow we are quite old friends already, and consequently stand in no need of your good offices."

"May I, likewise, venture to dispense with a formal introduction," said Cuthbert, extending his hand; "it is impossible to meet as a stranger one I have been intimately acquainted with, through my sister's letters, for some months past."

"Now, Nelly," said Maude, "that you

have blushed, bridled, and simpered, quite as much as is necessary in return for the pretty speeches you have received, and which, by the by, it is a pity Mrs. Hobbes did not hear, you will perhaps observe, that my uncle is waiting to take Mrs. Travers in to dinner, which Susan some time back informed us was waiting."

It was not till seated at the dinner table I had an opportunity of observing my new acquaintances. Maude had never expressly told me her brother was a very handsome man, although I had always taken it for granted that he was so; nor was I disappointed in my expectations respecting him; and yet I do not suppose he would have been generally considered handsome. He was very dark—the darkest Englishman I had ever beheld; with brilliant black eyes, and a profusion of glossy, waving hair of the same colour. The character of his face when in repose was very grave, but this expression vanished the moment he became animated in conversation; while the dimples which played

around his mouth gave a singularly fascinating expression to his smile.

Maude had spoken so little, and that little in such a depreciatory manner of her brother's friend, that I was suprized at finding him the very reverse of the commonplace person she had represented. He was not so handsome as her brother certainly, at least I did not consider him so; he was very tall and slight, with a high forehead, aquiline nose, and very bright blue eyes, a little inclining to obliquity, and his naturally fair complexion was burnt red by exposure to the weather. These were his chief personal characteristics; but the easy grace of his movements, and the simplicity of his manners, would have prevented the term "commonplace" from being applied to him in any society in which he might have chosen to mingle.

When we left the dining parlour, Maude insisted on going to her room, that I might at once give her my opinion of her brother. My measured encomiums on the idol of her heart did not please her.

"You could not have spoken more coldly,

Nelly, if I had asked your opinion of Louis Stainton."

"I think Mr Stainton a very agreeable person, Maude, and one that will in every respect bear a comparison with your brother."

She opened her large dark eyes to their fullest extent, the colour flashed into her cheeks, and, after a short pause, she said, "If I thought that was your real opinion, Nelly, I would beat you," and she held up her hand in a threatening manner. "But, no, you only say so to tease me; you cannot mean seriously to compare Louis with my brother. Why, my dear child! have you looked at his eyes?—he actually squints."

"Some persons would admire the little peculiarity you allude to Maude, and it is much too slight to deserve the term you have applied to it."

"I had no idea," answered Maude, coldly, "that you were one of those young ladies who admired an ugly man, if he happened, at the same time, to be a rich one."

I could only laugh at such an absurd accusation, as I answered, "My dear Maude, what

can it matter to me, whether this gentleman, who seems the especial object of your displeasure, be handsome or the reverse. The little I have seen of him induces me to think him an agreeable, well-informed man, and that is all women in general regard. I do not think the appearance of a man has anything whatever to do with winning a woman's affections. 'Desdemona saw Othello's visage in his mind,' and the ugliest Englishman on record, Wilks, used to boast that he only required half an hour's grace over the handsomest man in the room, to fascinate any woman he chose to take the trouble of captivating. Therefore, Maude, I am sure your evident dislike to Mr. Stainton must proceed from some other motive than his personal appearance."

"I do not dislike him," said Maude, colouring highly; "but he certainly must have bewitched you, if you can seriously compare him, either in person, manners, or intellect, to my brother."

She quitted the room in such evident ill-temper, that I was agreeably surprised when I entered the drawing-room, to see Mr. Stain-

ton assisting her with the coffee-cups, and that she received the attention with as much good-humour as if he had been as handsome as Apollo.

"By the way, Maude," asked he, while occupied in this manner, "did I not hear you make some allusion to Mrs. Hobbes, this afternoon? I hope that accomplished lady is quite well, and that she has acquired a few more set speeches with which she will regale my ears to-morrow morning, for I shall not be able longer to postpone the pleasure of calling at the Down Farm."

"I have no doubt," said Maude, "you will be gratified by the reception you will receive from its mistress. You will find she has improved considerably in her knowledge of the French language, as well as in English composition."

"Indeed, Maude! then I am to conclude the Phœnix, whose loss she used to deplore so pathetically, has reappeared, and is blazing with even more than its wonted brilliancy in the abode of the honest farmer. He had better beware that it does not too much

dazzle the eyes of his wife, or he may find its perpetual consumption rather more costly than he may approve of."

"I suppose," said Maude, throwing a comic look of perplexity in her face, "that the metaphorical language you have just uttered is intended to convey the simple question of whether Miss Meredith has resumed her duties in the family of Mrs. Hobbes?"

"My meaning, most concisely expressed, Maude."

"Then I am under the painful necessity of extinguishing any hopes you may have entertained of beholding that distinguished luminary."

"I have no hopes on the subject," answered Louis. "She was a beautiful creature, certainly, but I never saw her without thinking of a tiger cat; and yet how soft she purred round the domestic hearth of Mrs. Hobbes, with what velvet paws must she have abstracted that five hundred pounds from the pocket of her patroness, for the distressed countess. The only wound she inflicted was

on the poor woman's soft heart, by her protracted absence. But never believe I shall not meet her again, Maude; such women are sure to turn up, for evil, sooner or later."

## CHAPTER IV.

LOUIS STAINTON did not make his appearance at Mrs. Headley's breakfast-table. It was, I found, his custom to take all his meals in his own apartments, and never intrude into those of Mrs. Headley, unless specially invited to do so.

"Is it not rather dull for him," asked I, of Maude, "to pass all his time alone?"

"Don't distress yourself on that account, Nelly, I always find he is willing enough to bestow his tediousness on others. Cuthbert will be with him all the morning, and will, I dare say, ask him to dinner. I never have the opportunity of conversing for half an hour with my brother uninterruptedly when Louis is here."

So, then, I had discovered the reason of her dislike to Mr. Stainton; she was jealous of his occupying so much of her brother's time, and regarded him as a rival in his affections.

I could fully sympathise with this feeling. I had often suffered acutely when I imagined those I loved did not respond as warmly as I wished to my affection. Many bitter tears I had wept at what I considered my mother's unjust partiality for Henry, but Maude's nature had seemed to me so different to my own, so wholly unselfish—for surely selfishness must be the foundation of all jealousy—that it appeared incredible she should entertain such unkind feelings towards one she had known from infancy, simply on account of the affection which subsisted between himself and Cuthbert. Oh! thought I, how many times has she lectured me for what she called my silly susceptibility? how easy is it to conceal our own failings, when there is no strong feeling to drag them into the light.

I had a proof there was some truth in

Maude's remarks respecting her brother, for before he had finished breakfast, a note was given him from his friend.

"Louis wishes me to walk with him over the cliffs to Hinchford," said he, when he had read it, "and if we do so, we shall not be home till late in the afternoon. I suppose, mother, I have your permission to invite him to dinner?"

Maude looked vexed, and said, pettishly, "I conclude I must not expect to see you more than a few minutes at a time, without your 'Fides Achates;' I don't call that coming home, it is only visiting Mr. Stainton."

"There is something on the other side," said her brother, without replying to her remark. "It concerns Miss Travers and yourself. He wishes me to obtain your consent to walk with us as far as the Down Farm, as he fears to encounter the whole flood of Mrs. Hobbes's polite speeches."

"Then why does he go?" said Maude; "I conclude it is not imperative he should do so. Nelly and I were going in quite another direction to-day."

"Then do not alter your plans, Maude, on our account. I will tell Louis you would rather not go with us."

"Then you would tell an untruth, Cuthbert. If I cannot have half-an-hour's conversation with you without your friend, I must not neglect the opportunities he graciously allows me in his presence; so if you, Nelly, do not object, we will be ready at twelve o'clock. You had better go and ask your mamma's permission at once."

"I am very glad you are come, my dear," said my mother, when I entered her room; "I wish to consult you on a business affair. I require a cheque for sixty pounds, and I really do not know whether there is sufficient at the banker's to meet it."

"Sixty pounds!" said I, in consternation. "My dearest mother, what can you want such a sum for here?"

"What, Nelly," answered she, playfully, "must I say 'my foot, my tutor;' but if it is necessary to give an account to my child, I will cheerfully tell her why I require this money.

"There is a poor family in this place I have promised to relieve. Their boat was wrecked during a severe gale last autumn, and the husband perished with it. Since that time they have been almost destitute of the means of sustaining life, owing to their inability to procure a share in any other vessel. The sum I have mentioned will enable them to do so, and thus, Nelly, be the means of earning bread for a family of ten persons. Now are you satisfied that your mother does not wish to appropriate it unworthily?"

"Oh, mamma!" cried I, "do not—pray do not use such words! Do not judge me so unkindly; but indeed....."

I stopped and hesitated how to convey my meaning. I could not bear to control the impulse of her kind heart by telling her she ought not to fulfil her benevolent intention.

I knew that if this bounty was bestowed, we should not be able to reach the end of the current quarter, without the necessity of obtaining money through the medium of a

stockbroker, and this just after the prudent arrangements made for us by Mr. Lancester.

"Go with me, Nelly," said my mother, in a cold, displeased tone of voice, "go with me and see the misery this sum will alleviate. I have long wished to aid this poor family, but would not listen to the dictates of my heart till Mr. Lancester's arrival gave me knowledge of the improved condition of my income. The thought that I might, without great imprudence, give the means of future subsistence to the widow and fatherless. enabled me to hear with fortitude that I was to remain an exile for years to come, from the home to which I was longing to return. But come with me, and then I do not think you will wish me to recall the promise I have given."

My mother, leaning on Martha's arm, took the road to the beach, and I, with a guilty feeling of having given her pain, walked silently by her side, till we came to the Widow Simpson's hut, or rather den, into which I followed her.

It was one of the most miserable abodes

which could be imagined, consisting of two wretched rooms, the back part of which were dug out of the cliff, while the front, by which we had entered, was composed of a few rough planks loosely nailed together.

To this desolate habitation had the poor widow been compelled to remove, when her husband, and the boat which had won them a living for so many years, were together lost.

Coming suddenly out of the bright sunshine into this murky den, it was some little time before I could discern its occupants; but when I was able to do so, I no longer accused my mother of imprudence in promising to alleviate the wretchedness I beheld.

On a miserable bed, on the dank floor of the hut, was stretched a youth of apparently thirteen or fourteen years of age, whom a little girl, two or three years younger, was endeavouring to feed with some kind of fluid, contained in the broken cup she held in her hand. Half-a-dozen other children, varying from ten years old to a baby of apparently as many months, were crawling on the ground;

while a tall, good-looking young man, the eldest of this forlorn family, was occupied in tenderly supporting the poor mother, who, in all the agony of a severe fit of the ague, was shivering over a small fire which smouldered on the hearth.

The young man rose as we entered, but almost immediately resuming his place by the suffering woman, again passed his arm round her waist, as if to prevent her falling when the violence of her disease shook her attenuated frame.

"You may leave her to Martha," said my mother, kindly, "she has brought something which will, I hope, prove of service to her."

The youth arose quickly, and, muttering some words of gratitude, left the hut with the alacrity with which all men hasten from scenes of physical sufferings.

As soon as he had quitted the place, my mother administered to the poor woman the support he had previously afforded her, while Martha busied herself in warming some of the nourishment she had brought with her. When the sufferer had swallowed a portion of

it, she was assisted to a rude bed in the further room, where my mother remained with her, leaving Martha leisure to attend to the sick youth.

What a difference did a few minutes make even in the appearance of that comfortless habitation.

Clean linen was spread on the poor boy's bed, his face and hands bathed in warm water. The girl who had been attending to him was instructed how to cleanse the dirty floor, the hearth was swept, and the door set wide open that the fresh, pure air might purify the stifling atmosphere of the small crowded room, and refresh the poor wasted form which for many weary months had reclined on that wretched couch.

Then, when everything his kind-hearted attendant could do for his comfort was accomplished, she prepared some food which the poor invalid could swallow without nausea.

Neither were the younger ones forgotten. They were provided with a plentiful meal of wholesome, though homely, viands, which were produced from the basket, which I

could not forbear likening to the "widow's cruise," its contents appeared to be so inexhaustible.

While my nurse was thus busily occupied, I was listening to the statement of the crippled boy.

He had been with his father and elder brother in the boat on the melancholy night when it was wrecked. His brother escaped uninjured, and had supported him in the water till they were rescued. But this poor child never recovered from the effects of that night's severity. For many weeks he struggled fiercely with death; and, though he for the time conquered his terrible adversary, he had never risen from his bed since. It was supposed that when the boat was lost his knee must have struck violently against the sinking vessel, and have seriously injured it. The humane and skilful surgeon of the village had tried every remedy in vain. The limb gradually wasted away, and no hope of preserving the sufferer's life was entertained, unless he would consent to amputation

—a trial from which mother and patient equally shrunk.

The sole support of this helpless family depended on the labour of the elder son.

Josiah Simpson was a good hard-working self-denying lad; but the small sum he earned weekly for assisting his wealthier neighbours in their fishing-boats, was wholly inadequate to procure necessaries for his family, and since the poor mother's illness they had endured the very extremity of privation.

My mother had become acquainted with this scene of distress some weeks previously; and when she heard from Mr. Lancester the favourable terms he had obtained for her house, she, with her usual impulsive benevolence, had sent Martha with the glad tidings that she would furnish sixty pounds to purchase Jos a share in the boat which was for sale in the village, and thus give him the means of earning a decent maintenance for his mother and her children.

All this I learnt from poor Ned, while Martha was attending to the hungry children. And tears of grateful joy rolled down his

cheeks, as he told me of the blessings which would result from the promised bounty.

Jos's share of the profits of the fishing boat would enable them to leave their present wretched hovel, and remove into a decent habitation—humble indeed, but in the eyes of these poor people a perfect palace of comfort and respectability. Then, too, Jos would take little Jem—a noisy urchin of eleven years old—to sea, and make a man of him; and his mother would soon be well, now that better days were dawning on her children. And then Betsy, the little floor scrubber, could go as maid to one of the farmer's wives in the vicinity; and the little ones, decently clad, would be able to attend the village school.

The lame boy was not without a vision of hope for himself in the picture he sketched in such bright colours for his family.

"When the doctor told me I must have my leg cut off or I should die, I said I would sooner die than live to be a burden to that brave 'Jos' and every one about me. But now, ma'am"—and the face of the speaker

brightened with anticipated happiness—"Jos says if I'll have it off, he'll soon save money to let me learn basket-making from old Anderson, at Hinchford, and then I shall be able to keep myself and help mother a bit, too, if God pleases to give me strength."

The poor child sunk exhausted on his pillow when he ceased speaking.

I was deeply affected by this recital of the "Short and simple annals of the Poor," and reproached myself for having dared, even by a look, to censure the benevolence which was to be followed by such blessed results; and, as I was returning home with my mother, humbly entreated her forgiveness for the manner in which I had presumed to speak to her.

She would not, however, acknowledge I had erred.

"You did quite right, my dear, in remonstrating with me. You could not tell, till you had witnessed the scene we have just beheld, the happiness the money would confer. I fear that many cases equally distressing may be met with on every part of this coast; but

that I cannot relieve all, is no argument for refusing to aid one; but here comes Maude and her brother to seek you—join them, my dear, and I will return home with Martha."

Maude was in exuberant spirits when I met her. She had succeeded in getting rid for a time of Louis, and exulted with the glee of a delighted child at having sent him on what she called a wild goose chase after myself.

"Not finding you in the house, Nelly, I suggested it was possible you might have walked alone to the cliff, and the gallant knight immediately set off in that direction, leaving me at liberty to say a hundred things to Cuthbert I might not otherwise have been able to impart for a week."

"You will induce Miss Travers to believe that Louis is a very selfish friend, Maude. When she is better acquainted with him, she will learn to distrust your statements respecting him; but here he comes back from the fruitless errand on which you sent him."

Early as our visit was paid to the Down Farm, we found its mistress quite ready to

receive us. She was costumed for the purpose, as nearly as possible like one of the figures in books of fashion for the month, that is, as far as regarded the materials of which her dress was composed, but the manner in which the rich silk was fashioned to her buxom figure, would have astonished the *modiste* who had designed the plates from which it was supposed to be copied; while the pretty round cap with its quilling of cherry-coloured ribbons, which would have had a captivating effect if placed on the dark glossy hair of Maude, looked wofully out of character surmounting the rubicund countenance of Mrs. Hobbes.

That lady was, however, perfectly satisfied with her own appearance, and evidently considered it entitled her to the respect of those who had the privilege of beholding her thus elegantly attired. She received her visitors with even more than her usual dignity, while she welcomed the gentlemen in a speech which must have cost her much labour to have acquired by heart, concluding it with the words:—

"This early call, gentlemen, is highly

flattering to Mr. Hobbes and me. He is unfortunately absent, and will, I am sure, feel deep regret at not having the pleasure of seeing you."

Then addressing herself exclusively to Mr. Stainton, she proceeded to express her hope that he intended to honour Baymouth with a lengthened visit.

"It is indeed deeply to be deplored that your ancestral halls are inhabited by strangers, and that the last descendant of an ancient line should only be a visitor in the place where his forefathers exercised the power of life and death over unnumbered vassals. May the time come when they may once more acknowledge you as their rightful lord."

Louis maintained the most decorous gravity while addressed in such magniloquent language; but Maude turned to the window, and I could see the difficulty she had in repressing the mirth it excited.

"You are very kind, Mrs. Hobbes," said Mr. Stainton, in reply. "And I am sure I am greatly obliged for the manner in which

you have alluded to my ancestors; but I fear if I could purchase back the whole of the lands they once owned in this neighbourhood, I should not with them regain the allegiance of those you designate as vassals. I am therefore thankful to know that if I do not possess lands, and lordship, if I have not the power of life and death over my neighbours, I at least have kind friends who welcome me for my own sake as you do, my dear Mrs. Hobbes."

The reply to this was a profound curtsey, and a request that the party would partake of a *déjeûner*, which was ready in the dining-room.

"We have already breakfasted, thank you, Mrs. Hobbes," said Maude, "and are nearly ready for our luncheon at this time of the day."

"Law, Miss Headley!" cried the lady of the farm; "of course I meant that, only it's more genteel to say *déjeûner*." Then taking the French letter from her work-table, which Maude had translated for her, she again attacked Louis Stainton. "Will you honour

me by perusing this letter? I am sure you will be pleased with the progress my daughters are making in their studies."

"Read it yourself, Mrs. Hobbes," said Maud maliciously.

That lady hesitated for a moment, and then with a look of relief, as if she had conquered a difficulty, replied,

"I have not, as you are aware, had the advantage of foreign travel, and therefore will not excruciate your ears with my perhaps, not very correct pronunciation of the French language, but I will give you a translation of it with pleasure;" and opening the letter, she glanced over it as if to master its contents, and then gave word for word the version Maude had written for her.

This was too much for the patience of that young lady, and determined to bring Mrs. Hobbes at once to the ground, she abruptly asked her, "How many pounds of butter a good cow ought to give at that season of the year?"

The fine lady was immediately transformed

into the cat. Maude had played the part of the mouse, and was directly sprung at.

"How many pounds a week? why, I have made nine in winter, and fourteen in summer, from old Suke, but she was a real good 'un, there's not many like her; not but what Kerry Bess has made as much, but then I used to give her bran and oil-cake, while Suke never had anything but hay and grass."

The fine lady was so completely for the moment sunk in the dairymaid, that it was not till she had finished her eulogium on her favourites, she observed how much her sudden descent from gentility amused her listeners, and when she did so, seemed hardly able to decide whether she should be indignant, or laugh over her lapse. Louis put an end to her doubts, by saying—

"Thank you, Maude, for bringing back my old and dear acquaintance, whom I love much more than I do Mrs. Hobbes. Oh! Nancy, do you remember how many times I have coaxed you out of a bowl of Sukey's cream, to eat with the curds you had made expressly for Maude and me. How many sillibubs guilt-

less of wine, but rich in raspberry jam and currant juice have you made for us, when we followed you into the meadows at milking time, and the jugs of fresh whey you would have ready, when tired and thirsty with hay-making, we used to throw ourselves down, and declare we could not move till you brought us the cool refreshing drink from your dairy. Ah! those were happy days, though this grim lawyer," and he placed his hand on Cuthbert's shoulder, "has forgotten all about them; but Maude and I have more grateful memories, and cannot forget our dear Nancy in the rich and fashionable Mrs. Hobbes."

Mrs. Hobbes was quite contented to be reminded of her former condition, when Louis made the *amende* by styling her "fashionable." She looked down on her rich dress with complacency, peeped slyly in the glass at the jaunty little cap, and then satisfied she deserved the epithet, declared it did her good sometimes to talk over old times. "That is with friends like yourselves, who pay me proper respect, now that circumstances have altered cases, as I says to John,

who will go on having his dinner in the kitchen just as he did before uncle left us the fortin; but there, it's no use to expect white bread, if you don't take the bran out of the meal, so he must go on in his own way."

"And a very good way too, Nancy," said Louis, "if it is one every one likes him for walking in. I do not know a man whom I respect more than I do John Hobbes. Is he not kind to his dependents, charitable to his poor neighbours, honest and upright in all his dealings, a good husband and father, a faithful friend, and a humble Christian? Believe me, my dear old friend, you have more reason to be proud of your husband, than if he had been born like the ancestors of whom you reminded me, to wealth and station, which were too frequently employed as vehicles for oppressing those over whom they exercised such fearful power."

Mrs. Hobbes looked perfectly bewildered by the warmth of Mr. Stainton's eulogium on her husband, whom, since her elevation, she had regarded with a considerable amount of contempt.

"John is a good husband enough," she answered, after a short pause, "but that is no excuse why he should go on in the way he does; if he would only have let Miss Meredith have polished up his manners a bit, he would have been none the worse man that I can see."

"Dear Mrs. Hobbes," said Cuthbert, "pray do not speak of that woman and your husband at the same moment; Louis has just told you what he considers him, I will give you my opinion of her. It is that she was a vile imposter, and it was a most fortunate thing for yourself and family she became tired of the monotony of the farm, and quitted it before she had victimized you to a greater extent than she did."

Mrs. Hobbes had borne a great deal from her visitors that morning: she had been forced to drop her pretensions to gentility, and be reminded of her former servitude: had listened to the praises bestowed on her husband, and heard him applauded for the very conduct which incensed her against him; and yet she had preserved her good humour; but

when she heard her beloved and lamented Arabella's character assailed, her patience broke down, and in an angry voice she replied to Cuthbert's denunciation of the absent governess by asserting she was a lady whom it was an honour to know, and that she lived in daily hopes of her return.

"Oh, my dear, dear friend," sobbed the excited woman, "why don't you come back, and show your enemies you are as good and true as you are elegant and beautiful? What a happy mother I should be if my girls could only be finished by you; I should not have a wish on earth then!"

"Let us hope it may not be gratified," said Maude, hastily, "not for your own sake, but for that of your children. Now, Nelly, if you are ready we will go"—and with a stiff bow instead of the usual friendly hand-shaking, she quitted the room, leaving the silly woman half ready to cry at the formality of the leave-taking—half disposed to feel gratified by the respect which she imagined it was intended to convey.

As we returned alone over the downs,

Maude furnished me with several anecdotes connected with Miss Meredith. She was, according to her, in every sense an impostor; she had but a slight knowledge of most of the accomplishments she professed to teach, but this little knowledge proved a very dangerous thing to Mrs. Hobbes, for it induced her to credit all that was told her by the imperious creature who for two years ruled herself, her children, and her household. When she first arrived at the farm, she exerted herself to acquire some influence over honest John, but the poor fellow was too much awed by her showy costume, extreme beauty, and usually haughty manners, to be propitiated by her condescension to himself; and perceiving he remained insensible to her fascinations, she bestowed them all on his foolish wife, and succeeded in making her heartily ashamed of her unsophisticated husband. I expressed my surprise that with the power she had possessed over Mrs. Hobbes, she should have let her escape so easily,

"It is that very moderation," replied

Maude, "that makes one fear she intends at some period to revisit the place."

Cuthbert and his friend did not return from their visit to Hinchford till very late in the evening, and Maude punished them for their long absence by sullenly refusing to listen to the explanation they wished to give of their delay.

## CHAPTER V.

THE next morning, while still seated at breakfast, Louis entered the room, and after entreating Mrs. Headley's pardon for his intrusion, told Cuthbert the horses were arrived, and that advantage should be taken of the fineness of the day, to set off at once for a long ride.

Maude rose with an exclamation of delight. "You dear, kind Louis, why did you not say the reason why you were so late, last night?"

"Because you refused to listen, Maude; you may imagine it was some little trouble to procure five good horses, two of which must be quite safe for Miss Travers and yourself. Thanks to some of my old friends at Hinchford, I succeeded in borrowing them for a

week, and as the day is such a bright one, I think we had better set off at once for Durnham heronry, which I have heard you express a wish to see. It is one of the very few remaining in the country, and the ride to it over the downs is delightful."

"But, Nelly," said my mother, "you are not horsewoman enough to ride so far, even if you had a proper dress."

"Pray, dear Mrs. Travers, do not make any objection," cried Maude, "Nelly has often ridden as far on Mr. Hunt's grey pony, and as for her costume, I can manage that well enough; only say she may go, there's a darling mamma."

"I am sorry to refuse you any request, my dear, but I cannot consent to trust her to such a reckless party as I see you will prove."

"Reckless! why my uncle is going with us; you need not fear but that he will take care of Nelly."

"I do not care to go, Maude," said I, as my mothers till persisted, although the tears of disappointment were in my eyes; "I would

much rather stay at home if mamma has any objection to my leaving her."

Mr. Lancester came to Maude's assistance:

"Trust her to me, Mrs. Travers, I will bring her back safely, do not fear; I will keep by her side the whole time. There is no fear of an elderly gentleman who weighs nearly fourteen stone, riding like one of these harum-scarum boys."

Very reluctantly was the permission at length conceded, and I was on the point of declaring my intention of remaining at home, when Maude, catching me round the waist, hurried me from the room.

"I know what you were about to say, you unkind little creature, and just stopped you in time. It is only mamma's old-fashioned prejudices; she thinks, I believe, that a riding party requires a *chaperone* as much as a ball, quite forgetting that my brother and uncle are part of it; but we must be quick if we intend riding so far to-day."

Several times before we were ready Louis called to us to hasten—that the beauty of the day would be over—the horses would be-

come impatient, and thus prove more difficult to manage—and that we must give up all hopes of reaching the heronry that morning.

Not one bit the more did Maude hurry herself for these exhortations, and when deciding at last we were properly "got up," she descended to join the impatient cavaliers, she claimed great credit for her expedition.

For the first time since his arrival, I observed that Louis regarded her with evident admiration. There are few young women who do not appear to advantage in a riding dress, and Maude, certainly, was no exception to the rule. She was, to use her own words, remarkably well "got up." Her habit had been a present from Cuthbert the previous year, and fitted her to perfection, while the black hat with the long waving white feather, was the most becoming headdress that could have been devised for her. I never saw her look so lovely, as with sparkling eyes and saucy smile, she claimed the gratitude of the gentlemen for her speedy toilet.

"Well, Maude," said her uncle, "I really

don't think we have any right to complain of the delay now we see what it has afforded us. I think Nelly and you should be photographed just as you are, and give us copies of the picture as a reward for our patience."

"Photographed, indeed! Do you suppose, uncle, I will ever have my charms transmitted to posterity by that disfiguring process? Why, it transforms a youthful beauty into an ugly resemblance to her grandmother. I should be a remarkably ancient likeness of Meg Merrilies, while Nelly would come out as one of the great wide-face model dolls we see in the bazaars. At this moment, however, I feel more like the gallant hunchback than the gipsy queen, and cry, a horse, a horse!"

My mother followed us into the court-yard, in order to see me safely mounted by Mr. Lancester, whose especial charge I was to be; unfortunately, he was not a very expert groom, and two or three times he attempted to place me in the saddle without success, and each time, by some awkward movement on my part, his hat was knocked from his

head, and rolled some distance from its owner, and each time it was restored to him by Louis Stainton with a low bow, and a request that he might to be allowed to supersede him in his unaccustomed duty. Maude, who, with her brother's assistance, had sprung from the ground as lightly as a bird rises from its nest, sat looking, half amused, half vexed, at the ridiculous figure I presented.

"Pray, Mrs. Travers," cried she, when for the fourth time Mr. Lancester's hat fell from his head, "allow Cuthbert to mount Nelly, if it is only out of pity to my uncle."

Cuthbert, without waiting for my mother's reply, advanced towards me, and, taking my foot in his hand, the next moment, to my own satisfaction, and Mr. Lancester's discomfiture, I was in the saddle.

The object of our destination that day was an old-fashioned mansion formerly belonging to a family of wealth and distinction, but, at the present time, inhabited by the farmer, who rented several hundred acres of the land belonging to the estate. One of the conditions of his lease was, that he should

carefully preserve the heronry, which was situated in what was formerly the extensive park that surrounded the house. This restriction, I was informed, was a source of great annoyance to the present occupier, as seldom a day passed during the summer in which parties of visitors did not arrive for the purpose of seeing the rare birds, whose habitation it had been for a fabulous number of years.

We were a very merry party that bright November morning, as we cantered over the short springy turf of the downs, and inhaled the fresh pure air from the sea. Mr. Lancester was right when he said that he did not ride like a "harum-scarum boy," and, somewhat to my own mortification, I had to jog soberly by his side, while our companions galloped some distance from us, and again returned, making, as Mr. Lancester took care to tell them, the poor horses do double duty.

When at length we arrived at the park, we looked for some one to guide us to the heronry, but no one was in sight, and all our endeavours to discover it for ourselves proving

fruitless, we determined to apply at the house for directions; but we knocked in vain; no reply was bestowed on our somewhat noisy summons. At last, Cuthbert started off towards a large barn, from which we heard the sound of a flail, and presently returned with a surly-looking labourer, who, telling us in a churlish tone to follow him, walked quickly towards a large gate we had tried in vain to undo; we passed through it, and, after a walk of twenty minutes, entered a long and lofty avenue of trees, the upper branches of which were laced and interlaced together till they formed arches of exquisite beauty, which in the summer must have completely excluded the sun rays; they were now bare of leaves, and we could admire what might be called their wonderful architecture; every twig of which they were composed being as symmetrically laid as if they had been fashioned by the hand of the most skilful artist.

"This is the heronry," said our guide, stopping when he had reached the middle of this superb arcade.

We looked in all directions, but no sign of

a bird bigger than a thrush could be discerned hopping among the leafless branches of the huge trees.

"Oh! this is the heronry, is it, my good fellow?" said Mr. Lancester; "and a very beautiful place it is; but where are the herons?"

"There be their nestes," said the man, with a grin, pointing to some large empty masses of sticks and moss at the top of the trees; but if you wants to see the herons, you must come before sunrise or after sunset; they goes to their feeding-grounds, a good way off, in the morning, and don't come back till night."

We looked at each other in a sort of comic dismay. We had ridden twenty miles to see only the empty nests of the birds we were so anxious to behold. Our guide evidently chuckled over our disappointment with such satisfaction, that we could not longer forbear joining in his merriment.

"Oh!" said the man, "I'm glad you takes it easy; some of the folk who come here in the summer expects to see the long-legged var-

ment as plentiful as sparrows, and when I tells 'em they can't see one unless they comes before four o'clock in the morning, they calls me an imperdent fellow, and goes away without giving me so much as a shilling for all the trouble I've had in showing 'em what they comes to see, for none of 'em asks to see the birds, when they takes me away from my work. We wants to see the heronry, they says, and here 'tis, says I, when we gets here, just as I have to you."

"Well, my man," said Cuthbert, as he gave him some silver, "we are more grateful, you perceive, for your guidance. The heronry is well worth visiting, though we did expect we should have seen the birds as well; but can you allow us to put our horses up for a couple of hours in the farm stables?"

"As much as my place is worth to give 'em a drop of water," said the man, much more civilly than before he had pocketed Cuthbert's gift; "but you can stand 'em at the Durnham Arms, about two miles off."

People as lighthearted as we were that day can afford to laugh even at a disappointment;

and as we returned through the park, were every bit as merry as when we entered it.

The Durnham Arms the man told us of, fortunately was in our road home, as we had decided on not returning over the Downs, but it appeared a very long two miles from the park.

"We must surely have mistaken the road," said Louis; "we have certainly come more than double the distance the man mentioned, and I see no sign of any house yet."

"It is your impatience which causes you to think so," answered Maude, "and in truth, Louis, you are eager to attack the bacon and eggs sure to be provided for our luncheon."

She was, however, wrong in anticipating such dainty fare. When we did reach the small hostel, in which we were to pass the two hours of rest, it could furnish us with nothing but bread, butter, cheese, and ale.

Mr. Lancester, who never touched either of the two last mentioned articles, looked very rueful at the prospect of such a meagre meal, and asked if it was not possible to procure either chops, steaks, or wine.

"Lord love 'ee, sir," said the hostess, evidently "put out" by our arrival, "butcher's be two miles off, and as for wine, we have no call for it here, but we have downright good ale—that we have."

Maude who knew that, after a ride of three-and-twenty miles, her uncle required a more substantial luncheon than bread and butter, inquired whether a messenger could not be despatched to the butcher's to procure some kind of meat, but no one was to be met with about the premises but the landlady, and two lads who were employed in attending to the horses.

"Come, Cuthbert," cried Louis, "let you and I walk those two miles to the butcher's. Lend me a basket, if you please, ma'am, point us out the road, and have a roaring fire in your kitchen against we get back, and don't fear but we will have a good meal before we start."

The woman provided him with a basket large enough to have contained a large leg of mutton; and passing his arm through the handle with the greatest gravity, Louis

Stainton and his friend started off in search of a dinner. As soon as they were out of sight, Maude pinned up the skirt of her habit, and followed the mistress into the kitchen.

"We must make up a better fire at once, if you please," said the young lady; "and if you will tell me where I can find some potatoes, I will wash them and put them on the fire."

The woman, although at first disposed to resent Maude's encroachment in her domain, could not long resist the influence of her good humour. She gazed in astonishment at the quickness of her movements and the matter-of-fact way in which she set to work. But very soon throwing off her indifference to our accommodation, she told the young lady "It warn't fit for her to peel taters. If you wants to help, you had better lay the cloth, miss," said she, good humouredly. "You'll find glasses, and knives and forks, and all your wants, in that cupboard. They are never taken out 'cept on Durnham club

days. But everything is clean and handy-like."

Mr. Lancester, during the time we were thus occupied, was impatiently walking up and down in front of the house, expecting the return of the young men before it was possible they could have reached their destination.

He solaced himself by prophesying all sorts of disasters from the delay. We should be benighted; a thick fog would arise, and we should not be able to find our way home. Maude and myself would drop from our horses with fatigue before morning; and even if we succeeded in reaching Baymouth safely, we should never recover from the effects of such long exposure to the weather.

Maude endeavoured to laugh away these apprehensions; but finding he was determined to look on the gloomy side of everything connected with our return, she suddenly drew his attention from the topic by declaring there was no mustard in the house even if our foragers succeeded in procuring the

steak with which that condiment should be eaten.

Like most persons, Mr. Lancester forgot the future in the present, and his dismay at the prospect of having to eat steak without mustard became balanced by the hope that his luncheon might consist of chops, Maude having informed him she had discovered a supply of pepper in a tea-cup.

When all the preparations were completed within the house—the cloth neatly laid, the potatoes nearly done, the fire bright and clear, and the gridiron placed in readiness to receive the expected meat—we joined Mr. Lancester in his promenade before the door ; and within the time we had allowed had the satisfaction of seeing our commissary-general return with his basket well laden.

It not only, to the great contentment of the elder gentleman, contained steaks, but likewise mustard and ketchup ; which the careful butcher, knowing the scantiness of the resources at the "Durnham Arms," had liberally provided from his own well-furnished kitchen. There was likewise a new loaf, and,

what was better than that, a bottle of sherry, which Louis had persuaded the good-natured man to permit him to purchase from his own store.

"Not worth drinking!" I dare say, said the gentleman for whose especial behoof it had been brought, as Cuthbert insisted on his at once taking a glass; but to his own delight, as well as that of the young man, it was pronounced excellent.

Cheered by such an agreeable stimulant, he acknowledged his obligations to his purveyors, and I hoped he would soon look more hopefully on our journey home.

While Cuthbert was extracting the cork from the bottle of wine, Louis had taken his basket into the kitchen, where I soon heard his voice raised in altercation with Maude. Hastening to ascertain the cause of their dispute, I found it arose from the determination of each to assume the office of cook. Maude declared it was her province, and even if it was not, she had earned the right to it by her previous exertions in the kitchen; while Louis laughed at the idea of her knowing how to

broil a steak, and boasted of his own skill as a *chef*, acquired in many a sporting excursion.

"Talk about cookery indeed!" cried he, indignantly, "when you don't know the commonest duties of a kitchen-maid. Speak of your capability of cooking a steak, when you have never even thought of putting plates and dishes to the fire to receive it when done! The utmost I can allow you to do is to make yourself useful in such minor details. Now go and keep your uncle quiet by the assurance that in a few minutes he shall partake of a dish that the daintiest epicure, who gives five hundred a year to his *chef de cuisine*, cannot hope for in his own house."

Louis had not over-rated his own culinary abilities. Mr. Lancester—no mean judge of such matters—pronounced the steak dressed to perfection; and the gravity with which the cook received the praises awarded him, caused us to laugh much more heartily than the elder gentleman approved of. A dinner so admirably cooked, deserved to be eaten in silence and attention.

When he had finished, he said, "I think, Louis, if you had been a little more liberal with the butter and ketchup it would have been an improvement. Don't suppose I mean to find fault, but that idea has just suggested itself to my mind."

"I consider the remark you have just made, Mr. Lancester, not only disparaging to my skill, but very ungrateful as well. I beg to tell you the proper quantity of both the articles you mention were used by me, and that it would have been gross barbarism to have added a bit more of the one or a drop of the other. Lucullus himself could not have dined more luxuriously than you have dined to-day; and I own I feel hurt at the want of appreciation of the repast which dictated your last observation."

"Forget it then; and let us drink to the memory of the steak in a glass of this excellent sherry, of which, perhaps, I may be allowed to say without offence, that I am sorry you did not provide us with another bottle."

The good cheer had wonderfully improved

Mr. Lancester's temper, and he laughed at the fears he had expressed when, tired and hungry, he was anxiously awaiting the arrival of his dinner.

Our ride home was, therefore, as full of enjoyment as our journey from it. Indeed, for me, even more so; for Mr. Lancester, more confident on the level ground than when riding over the downs, allowed his horse to trot and canter, as fast as either Maude or myself cared to venture.

We reached home two hours later than the time fixed for our return, and both Mrs. Headley and my mother had been alarmed on our account. But Mr. Lancester took on himself the office of our champion, and would not allow either to utter one word of reproof. So bright a day must close without a cloud. We had been happy—we were returned in safety! What cause then for remonstrance?

"Run and take your habits off, young ladies," cried he; "and then give us some tea. And while we are drinking it we will tell our adventures during the day—of the heronry we did see, and of the herons we did

not. And, above all, will do justice to the skill manifested by Louis and Cuthbert as foragers in procuring materials for a dinner, and the abilities they exhibited both in dressing and eating it."

## CHAPTER VI.

BEFORE the end of the week which the young men spent at Baymouth had expired, I had learned to regard them both as old friends. A few days' domestication with them had done more towards establishing an intimacy than years of ordinary acquaintanceship could have done. But, pleasant as it was, I was not altogether sorry when the time arrived for their departure.

I do not know whether I possessed more vanity than is usual to girls of my age, but I sometimes fancied Cuthbert's manner towards me was different to that of his friend. It is Maude's fault, I thought, if it is so. She has, in her letters to her brother, given me credit for much higher qualities than I am

endowed with; he has not known me long enough to discover how little I deserve the eulogiums she has lavished on me, but when he does, he will feel only annoyance at the deceit practised on him. Besides, no matter how he may regard me, what have I to do with such vain fancies? My path in life lies straight before me, and it is one I would not exchange for any other. I never have, I never shall have, a thought or hope disconnected from my dear mother. Let me be satisfied by reflecting that both Louis and Cuthbert would continue to regard me as a friend, and dismiss from my mind all idle thoughts and speculations respecting either of them.

The last evening had arrived; on the morrow Cuthbert was to return to his chambers in the Temple, and work hard till the next vacation, and his friend intended to pass some of the winter months on the continent.

"What is a fellow to do in England at this time of year?" said he, in reply to a long exordium from Mr. Lancester, respecting the duty of landholders residing on their estates.

"It is dull enough even when shooting first commences. I am always tired by the time October is out, of having the house filled with lots of men I don't care a straw for, and that don't care a farthing for me irrespective of my pheasant covers. I sometimes wish I had never had these estates left me, and then I should have continued to lead a jolly life with Cuthbert in chambers. I dare say I should have been much happier receiving my fees—when they came—than I am in receiving the rents."

"Why don't you marry, and settle down as a respectable member of society, and give hostages to your country in the shape of wife and children?" inquired Mr. Lancester.

"Capital advice, certainly, my dear sir, and one of these odd days I may feel inclined to follow it, that is, if I am fortunate enough to meet with a lady who will rashly entrust her happiness to my keeping. At present, I decidedly prefer celibacy to matrimony. Hitherto, Cuthbert has outstripped me in every prize we have striven for; let him win this race as well."

"You forget, Louis," said the friend thus alluded to, "that we do not start fair; you are shod with gold, and will go lightly over the way—I must tread with toil and difficulty."

"So much the worse for me, Cuthbert; I should soon cease to value a prize that was lightly won. But, come, Maude, let you and I have our last game of chess; I am more eager to conquer you than any other of your sex at present."

"I do not wish to play this evening," said Maude, ungraciously. "However hard I might strive to defeat you, if you won you would boast of your easy victory. The intolerable conceit which dictated your last words, which influences your whole conduct, would exhibit itself even in a game of chess."

The words of this short speech were in themselves offensive, but the manner of the speaker rendered them still more so. Every one looked surprised at this sudden outburst of petulance, and for a moment no one attempted to answer it. Louis was the first to break the silence.

"My conceit must indeed be intolerable, since it has occasioned this bitter rebuke from one I have loved for years as a dear sister; the pain it has given me, may, perhaps, like nauseous medicines given to arrest the progress of some fatal malady, enable me to shake off a part of the despicable vanity which Miss Headley so justly condemns."

Without waiting for a reply, Louis Stainton left the room, after bidding good-night to all save the offending Maude, to whom he made a formal bow.

He had hardly closed the door, before Cuthbert exclaimed, "Maude!—Maude!—what could have induced you to say what you did? None know better than yourself how unjust the accusation was. Louis conceited!—there never lived a man more destitute of such a contemptible failing. I am fearful it will be some time before he forgets your uncalled-for bitterness of expression."

Maude rose, with eyes flashing with resentment. "Of course, Cuthbert, I do not require you to tell me this night that your affection for Mr. Stainton is stronger than it

is for me—that your sister is nothing in comparison with your friend—and that I am to be treated with harshness because I have dared to detect a flaw in the idol you have set up in your heart for worship; but as I am not very patient under a lecture, even from one I love as I do my brother, I will shorten it by saying good-night."

She instantly quitted the room, and I, instead of following her, as was my custom, was so completely amazed at her conduct, and dreading lest I too should incur her displeasure by reproving her, which I certainly should have done, for her violence both to Louis and her brother, resolved to wait in my mother's room till such time as I concluded she might be asleep.

It was very late when I entered the rooms appropriated to us; the door communicating between them I found closed, a thing which had never occurred before, and glad that I was not likely to come into collision with her that night, I took care to move as lightly as possible, that I might not awaken her if she was fortunately sleeping.

All was quiet for some minutes after I entered, when suddenly I was startled by hearing heavy sobs from her room. I opened the door between the apartments, and saw, to my great surprise, Maude dressed as she had left the drawing-room, but with very different looks—with pale cheeks, disordered hair, and swollen eyelids, she appeared the impersonation of wretchedness.

"Good heavens! Maude," exclaimed I, terrified at the wildness of her looks, "what is the matter with you? are you not well?" As I spoke, I took her by the cold, damp hand, and endeavoured to lead her into my room.

She hastily withdrew it from me, and placing them both before her face, cried, "Why do you ask me, Nelly? why wring from me a confession for which you will despise me for ever, for which I despise and hate myself. Pity me!—pity my miserable weakness, my mad folly!—while I own I am one of those of whom Louis spoke so contemptuously, I am one who would have proved the lightly won prize of which he would so soon have

wearied; for, without his ever bestowing one word, look, or thought of love on me, I have given him my whole heart, I have degraded myself by bestowing, unsolicited, that which, if he knew he possessed, he would throw from him as a worthless and despised toy."

Shocked and astonished, both at Maude's revelation and the vehemence with which it was poured forth, I did not, for some little space, endeavour to soothe the agitation of the poor girl, but when I did, she would not listen to me.

"No, Nelly, I cannot be calm, I cannot be composed as you term it! I have to-night severed the band which has existed for years between Louis and myself. I knew he only loved me as a sister, but I likewise knew that was more affection than he had ever yielded to any other woman, and I was satis fied and happy in that knowledge; but to-night, when he spoke so lightly of woman's love, and expressed his belief that it was for his gold and not for himself for which he would be sought and valued, the demon of pride induced me to show him how little it

weighed with me, and that he might never suspect my secret, I openly avowed that I disliked him. Now, I would give my right hand if those unjust words were never uttered, that I was still in possession of the brotherly love and esteem he entertained for me before I madly estranged him from me! Oh! Nelly, what shall I do?—how can I regain the friendship I have so wantonly thrown from me?"

"Listen to me Maude," answered I, as with her face still buried in her hands the poor girl continued to sob convulsively; "can you really believe the regard of so many years can be severed by a few hasty words? Louis is by this time regretting his angry reply to your unkind speech, as much as you are the speech itself; and, if he does not now, he will to-morrow, when you tell him how sorry you feel for your petulance."

"Tell him I am sorry?—allow him to see my folly, my unwomanly folly? Oh! Nelly, I did not expect such counsel from you!"

"Nay, but hear me, Maude. Would you not have entreated Cuthbert to forgive you,

if you had offended him as you have Louis? and will not your claiming the privilege of a sister be the best mode of concealing your true feelings? You seriously wounded the heart of one who regarded you with affection, it is right you should express contrition for your fault; and, as is most frequently the case, what is right and what is politic agree together. But tell me, dear, when did you first become aware of your feelings?"

"From the day I heard Louis was to succeed to the inheritance of his mother's uncle. While he was the companion and equal of my brother, studying the same profession, sharing the same home, I had no suspicion my love for him was different to that I felt for Cuthbert, and from the moment I acquired my fatal knowledge, I have sedulously endeavoured to preserve my secret even from my mother. When my father died, and we were compelled to remove from the Parsonage, I have told you how generously he placed this house at our disposal, and tried to make us believe he received an obligation instead of conferring one, by asking permission to make

it occasionally his home when Cuthbert was with us. To hide the joy I felt at this arrangement, I have always feigned to dislike it, and—accomplished hypocrite that I am—I have even succeeded in making Cuthbert believe that from motives of jealousy I would gladly welcome him unaccompanied by his friend."

It was a long time before I could calm her by assurances, that all would be forgotten and forgiven by Louis, without in the least compromising her secret; but at last I succeeded in inducing her to go to bed, where not long after, exhausted by the violence of her emotions, she fell asleep.

Now many things which had perplexed me in the poor girl's conduct, were accounted for. The manner in which she was in the habit of speaking of Louis, had sometimes induced me to imagine she must in reality dislike him, or at least entertain but little esteem for his character; but then the familiar and friendly terms in which they treated each other would discountenance that idea. Now, all this waywardness was explained:

absent from Louis she endeavoured to combat against what she justly considered a degrading weakness; but when in his society, was unable to receive with coldness his brotherly attentions.

As these thoughts passed through my mind, and I sat and watched the troubled expression of her pale face, contrasting it mentally with the bright, joyous look it usually wore, I was ready to exclaim with Benedict, "That though love might transform me into an oyster, till I was an oyster, it should never transform me into a fool;" and then ashamed even in thought of ridiculing the feelings I could not comprehend, I withdrew to my room to do penance for my remembrance of Benedict, by keeping awake for the purpose of concocting a scheme by which, without the slightest suspicion of Maude's feelings, Louis should become desperately in love with her. This, under the circumstances, was such a very difficult task, that no wonder I fell asleep before I had arranged the affair in a satisfactory manner.

The next morning Maude had quitted her

room while I was still sleeping, and rather dreading to find her in the state of unnatural excitement, she had displayed the previous night, I hurried to seek her as soon as I was ready. To my astonishment, she was with her brother in the breakfast-room, looking as bright and saucy as usual, although I could easily discern from the grave looks of Cuthbert, that he was remonstrating with her. I would have retreated when I saw how they were engaged, but Maude desired me to remain, and hear how patient and obedient she was to her brother on the last morning of his visit.

"He has been insisting on my telling his friend that I am sorry for my impertinence of last night, Nelly, and I have promised to swallow the penitential pill he has prescribed for me. I have told him you advised a similar dose last night, so I suppose I must not resist the advice of two such skilled physicians in the art of patching up a solecism in good breeding."

"Say good feeling, Maude," said her brother, and do not suffer your love for me

to render you unjust to Louis. It is a great pity you should be one of those unfortunate persons who think jealousy a proof of affection."

"Well, no more, Cuthbert; pray spare me. I have promised to eat my leek, and I will try and do it with a good grace."

Maude had to wait some time to proffer her apology. Louis breakfasted in his own room, and it was not till the carriage arrived to convey the friends to the station, that he entered the room to say farewell.

To Mrs. Headley his manner was, as usual, affectionate and respectful, and he parted from my mother and myself with many expressions of friendly regard.

While he was making these *adieux*, Maude was standing with her face to the window, apparently unconscious of his presence, and I began to fear he would leave without a word being exchanged between them. I think Louis was half disposed to do so, when, as if moved by some irresistible influence, he went towards her.

"Will you not say good-bye, Maude, to an old friend who, however conceited he may be,

has the good sense to love and appreciate you, and who earnestly hopes you will pardon the many times he must have unwittingly offended you?"

Maude turned quickly round, her face bathed in tears.

"It is for me to ask forgiveness, Louis. You have never been to me other than an indulgent and forbearing friend, and the words I uttered last night were as unjust as they were cruel."

"I have no doubt I justly deserved the rebuke you administered to my vanity. Perhaps it was a little more severe than you intended to bestow. When we meet again, I hope you will allow I have profited by it."

The remainder of the day Maude chose to pass alone, and I was not sorry that her doing so afforded me an opportunity of thinking over the events of the last week. I had not yet had time to realize the extent of the benefit Mr. Lancester had conferred on my mother by the arrangements he had made relative to the house at Streatham. It was a great blessing that I could return to Brook-

fields as *home* for five years, and that with common prudence our finances would prove equal to our necessities. I was rather vexed the payment of the sixty pounds for Jos Simpson's share of the boat was required immediately. Mr. Lancester, I thought, if aware of the circumstances, would lend the money till we could repay it from our income; but I dreaded to inform him of it, lest my mother should be annoyed at my doing so.

My meditations were interrupted by that gentleman, who proposed a walk on the beach. This kind friend took the opportunity of instilling in my mind the necessity of rigid economy, and his hopes that I would use my influence with my mother to prevent her further assisting Henry.

"You must by this time, Nelly, be conscious of the miseries which will environ you, if you once suffer yourselves to be encumbered with that most fatal of all burthens—debt. Do not, my dear child, think I wish to weary you by my injunctions to prudence, but for the sake of your brothers, you should prevent your mother from acting as impul-

sively as she frequently does. She is so utterly unselfish, that she would part with every shilling she possesses, if she thought it necessary for the welfare of others, and she does not see that she commits injustice towards several for the relief of one. Promise me Nelly, you will inform me, should she again imagine there is a necessity to spend more than her income."

I felt like a culprit as I listened to his earnest entreaties, and at the same time knew we were on the point of doing what he condemned in such strong terms.

He noticed the embarrassment of my manner, and questioned me concerning it.

"What is it, Nelly? you do not mean me to understand that within the last few days you have incurred fresh difficulties? If your mother is so imprudent, she must get out of them unaided by me."

Eager to exculpate her, I told the whole circumstances attending the promise given to the poor widow. When I had concluded, he said—

"I think the sooner you return to Brookfields the better. A poor labourer's family

is relieved by the gift of a few shillings. Benevolence to fishers is too costly to be indulged in by persons with such limited means as your mother. Still, if this money has been promised, it must be given; and I am glad, Nelly, you have told me of it. I will readily advance the sum you require, but before I do so, I will go and see she has not been imposed on by some artful tale of simulated distress."

"Let me go with you, sir."

"No, Nelly. I wish to draw my own conclusions, unassisted by such enthusiasts as yourself. Say nothing to your mother of my intentions. I shall not leave till to-morrow afternoon, and that will allow plenty of time for my inquiries."

The next morning when I heard Mr. Lancester had left the house after an early breakfast, I was at no loss to discover in what direction he had walked, and putting on my hat, I went towards the beach in the hope of meeting him. I had not gone far, before I descried him approaching, accompanied by Josiah Simpson.

When he joined me he nodded to the young man, and said, "Go at once where I directed you."

"Well, sir," inquired I eagerly, "are you satisfied there is no imposture in the case?"

"Perfectly, Nelly! Your mother, God help her kind, impulsive heart, has acted as every true woman who had the ability, ought to have done. The poor woman is not so well to-day, and I have sent her son to find some one more capable of attending to her than her daughter, who is too young to be alone in such a scene of misery. The boat must be purchased, Nelly, but not by the means you hinted at. I would not presume to interfere with your mother's benevolence, otherwise I should myself supply the funds for it; but she must consent to borrow it of me, leaving to my charge the task of removing these poor people from the wretched hovel they now exist in. As to my loan to your mother, it shall be repaid by small quarterly instalments, and thus you will have the delight of denying yourselves some slight gratification for the purpose of assisting

others, a gratification you would lose if you procured the money as you proposed; and always remember, Nelly, that the first step in imprudence, like the first step in guilt, almost invariably leads to others. I will tell your mother of my intentions, though I fear she will resent my interference."

To my great satisfaction, my mother cheerfully agreed to accept the loan of the money from Mr. Lancester, and they parted better friends than I had expected.

Two days was all that remained of the time we were to spend in Baymouth, and I was not sorry at the prospect of returning home. Maude had resumed her usual careless manner, and never dropped the slightest allusion to her confession on the night of her quarrel with Louis; so unconcerned did she appear, that I began to think her naturally impulsive character had induced her greatly to exaggerate the feelings she really entertained for the friend of her youth. She now evidently shunned me as much as possible, and it was only the night before our depar-

ture I had an opportunity of endeavouring to ascertain if this really was the case.

"It is no use beating about the bush," said she angrily; "why don't you honestly say—I want to know whether the scene you treated me to one night was a farce or a tragedy—a sham or a reality—why will you force me to revert to what I would gladly forget? but you shall have the truth: I was too miserable and excited to conceal my feelings—too bitterly disgusted with myself for entertaining them to reflect how much I degraded myself in your estimation, by betraying them; but I will conquer them before we meet again. You are the only person acquainted with my shame, and I do not fear you will blazon it.

"To show you how I can emancipate from my bonds when this man is absent, how completely I am his slave when he is with me, I will tell you that I had composed a little romance, in which he was to fall in love with my pretty little Nelly; yet when I sent him in pursuit of you the evening he arrived, I suffered all the pangs of jealousy—but we

will talk of this no more. Let us hope he will end it by taking my uncle's advice, and marry before he returns to England."

I own I was a little piqued by the way she had spoken of myself. I had imagined, like a silly girl, that the praises Maude had bestowed on her brother were intended, to some extent, to propitiate me in his favour, and now it was certain such an idea had never occurred to her. Well! it only proved on how slight a foundation a young girl will build her first romance. What could it matter to me; was I not already wedded, heart and soul, to my duties? What absurdity was it, then, to feel hurt that Maude did not appear to think me worthy of being noticed by her brother.

We quitted Baymouth with the promise that Mrs. Headley and Maude would visit us shortly after Christmas, to which time it wanted only three weeks. The parting with my friend revived all the affection for her which my wounded vanity had for a few hours weakened, and it was with delight I anticipated seeing her so soon again.

## CHAPTER VII.

The quietude of home contrasted at first rather unfavourably with the novelty and excitement of the time I had spent with my friends, but I soon became accustomed to it, and resumed my interest in the pursuits which formerly occupied me.

My mother continued at Brookfields the life of active benevolence she had commenced under the tuition of Mrs. Headley, and appeared to forget in the pleasure her new duties afforded her, that the time was long past when she ought to have received a letter from Henry. At all events she never alluded to his silence with any expressions of apprehension on his account.

Walter and Edmund were constant and

amusing correspondents, and their letters, as well as those of my sister, were eagerly expected and welcomed. Esther's present existence appeared to be one of unmixed happiness; she always seemed to consider her recovery as almost miraculous, and her letters never failed to contain some expression of her deep gratitude to God. In one of them, received shortly after our return home, she said:

"When I contrast my past life with my present—my former wretchedness with the happiness I now possess—I feel as if I was ungrateful to God for ever suffering my thoughts to stray from the contemplation of His mercies towards me. Oh! Nelly; you can never know the feelings which assailed me as I hoped against hope that Gerald's sanguine expectations of my recovery might be realized; and that, restored to health, and revived in heart, I might venture to accept his love, and look forward to the time when I might share the home which he told me from his earliest recollection it was his dream of the future to offer me. I am only fearful

my present felicity is too great to last, and that I shall become spoiled by my husband now that I am in health, as I was by all the dear ones at home when in suffering and in sorrow.

"It is a blessed thing to be so loved—to see Gerald so happy, and to believe that I am the cause of it. It even now seems like a dream as I walk through the busy streets leaning on the arm of my husband, after, perhaps, dining at a *table d'hôte*, or visiting one of the theatres; stopping sometimes to gaze at the lively groups which assemble round the doors of the *cafés*, talking, laughing, and gesticulating, as they do nowhere else, I believe, but in this place.

"Gerald declares that his *dolce far niente* mode of existence for the last year, has spoiled him for the life of toil he must commence on his return to England, but I do not fear such a result will follow his holiday. He is too energetic—too really devoted to his profession, not to welcome its duties when once more brought within their sphere. I really

believe he does fear the climate of England may not prove so beneficial to me as that of this delightful spot, but I laugh at such apprehensions, and tell him the sunshine in our hearts will enable us to bid defiance to the thickest fog which will ever visit London in November."

One of my great pleasures now, as formerly, was from my familiar intercourse with my friends at the Vicarage, by whom I was joyfully welcomed back. Mrs. Hurst jestingly asked me whether I had given my heart into the custody of either of the fine gentlemen I had met at Baymouth.

"No fear," said I, in the same tone, "they would neither have cared for such a commodity; and, worthless as it is, I do not intend to part with it without a consideration."

On inquiring after the family at Sandhill, I learnt that the old farmer was still very ill, and continued to treat his patient daughter with great severity. No tidings had reached the old man relative to his absent grandchild, for whose presence he seemed daily more anxious.

On my first visit to the farm after my return, I found Mrs. Locksley looking more wretched and careworn than ever. She wept as she told me of the unjust suspicions of her father relative to her daughter. He would not believe but that it was from a dread of being received with harshness she refused to return to the farm, and accused her of wishing, from interested motives, to keep her from him. "He has been very anxious to see you," said the poor woman; "and, if you please, do not contradict him whatever he may say of me. It will do no good; and only, perhaps, excite and irritate himself."

I found the old man in his accustomed seat, looking more feeble than when I had last seen him. His reception of me, if not very courteous, was at least sincere. He welcomed me with evident pleasure, but took care to tell me it was because he required my services in a matter he did not choose to entrust to his daughter, whom he told harshly to leave the room, and then at once acquainted me with its purport.

"You see, young madam, she won't let

her poor girl come home. I am certain sure she must have been to see her old grandfather after the notice I sent to the paper, and her unnatural mother drived her away again. She is afeard I shall leave the farm to the lass, and so I will if she's alive; and if she beant, I'll take good care her mother don't get it. I can will it to who I like, and it won't be she'll have it! Now, will you put down on paper what I tell 'ee, for Lawyer Sanders he bothers one so with long words, I don't know whether he writes down what I means or not."

"You must excuse me, Master Wishart," answered I, greatly annoyed at this request; "I cannot consent to do anything which may prove injurious to your daughter; and I must tell you that you wrong her very much by thinking she would prevent her daughter from coming back to you."

"Why don't the girl come then?—answer me that."

For the first time, it occurred to me that probably Hannah Locksley might be dead. Was it likely—if living and in England—

she would not have become aware of her grandfather's endeavours to discover her? and, for the sake of his hoarded wealth, have returned to him for a time?

The old man had kept his eyes on my face during the time these thoughts passed through my mind; and, as if he divined them, he cried, in a voice of mingled grief and anger—

"She is dead! my poor girl is dead! Died, mayhap, for want of some of the money I have hoarded up for her; and never knew how her poor old grandfather longed to see her, and tell her 'twas her own when he was gone. She wouldn't have had long to wait for it. But if she don't get the bits of things I love and vally, her good-for-nought mother shan't! Better destroy 'em myself than not be able to rest in my grave for thinking they'll be took down and sold by that canting Jezebel!"

And rising from his seat, to my horror and amazement, he tottered to the cabinet which contained the eggs he had collected as a boy,

and, raising his stick, shattered the glass which protected them.

Alarmed by the crash, his daughted rushed into the room, and hastening to her father, endeavoured to lead him back to his seat; but the fierce passion of the old man gave him strength to resist her, and raising his stick, he commanded her, in a stern voice, to begone, or it would not be the furniture only that should feel the weight of it.

The appalled woman, without heeding this threat, persevered in her entreaties to suffer her to lead him back to his seat.

"Let Miss Ellen then, if I must not touch you—but, for God's sake, do not strike me! Don't do what you'll repent as long as you live! Oh, father! if you would but believe how dearly I love you—how miserable I am at your unkindness! Would to Heaven I were at rest in my grave! What have I done—what crime have I ever committed—to be so fearfully punished, as to be alike hated by the child whom I bore and the father who gave me life? God help me to bear my heavy cross—God help me to bear it!"

Sinking into a chair, and covering her face, the unhappy woman sobbed with such convulsive agony, that the old man's rage subsided as he gazed on her; and, in a trembling voice, as if uncertain whether her grief proceeded from fear of his violence or the destruction of the cherished cabinet, he said—

"I didn't mean to hurt thee, wench; but I have a right to break what's mine, I s'pose. But have done with all this whimpering, and be quick to help me back to the chair. I feel qualmish like."

Alarmed at the faintness of her father's voice, Mrs. Locksley started to her feet, and reached him just in time to prevent his falling on the floor. I hastened to her assistance, and, between us, we managed to get him to his chair, where he reclined, apparently bereft of life.

"He is dead!" said the poor daughter, in a voice of anguish, as she looked on the pallid face which a few moments before had been crimson with passion. "He is dead—and

his last words were full of anger and reproach to me!"

"He is not dead," said I; for accustomed from childhood to witness my mother's attacks of syncope, I was not so alarmed as his daughter at his sudden seizure. "He will revive if you will assist me to pour some stimulant down his throat. I believe it is only the violence of his passion which has exhausted his strength. See! he already looks better—the colour is returning to his face!"

It was a pitiable sight to see the poor heart-broken woman bending over her lifeless father, while the tears fell like heavy rain on the hand she was caressing, and calling on his name in tones of frantic endearment. Presently the eyes of the old man opened, and he stared with a bewildered look at his weeping daughter. At last he muttered—

"What's the matter with the woman? What ails ye, Nanny?"

"Thank God you are better, father! Drink this, and then lie back a bit. Don't

try to talk, and you'll soon be all right again."

He did not attempt to resist his daughter's request; but when she had arranged his pillows, reclined against them for some minutes with closed eyes; then he spoke slowly, but collectedly—

"God forgive me, Nanny, if I have wronged 'ee; it isn't natural a mother should want to keep her girl away from home. You have always been a good daughter, and I don't know why I should think you would be a bad mother—only, when Hannah was here last, she told me you would not let her stop."

"Father, I implored her to remain with me! Is it likely a mother would drive her only child from her? But she refused, unless the man she brought with her should likewise be allowed to stay, even while she acknowledged he was not her husband. Much as I loved my unhappy child, I would not consent your honest name should be slandered by her living in open shame beneath your roof."

"Right, girl—right!" said her father,

dreamily. "I have always borne an honest name, though I have, maybe, been a little too close and hard. But p'raps Hannah has left the chap now, and would be glad to come to us, only she don't like for shame. We must find her, Nanny—we must find her!"

Almost before he finished speaking, his eyes closed in sleep; and thankful to be released from such a painful scene, I wished his daughter farewell, with the promise of calling on Mr. Neave as I returned, and requesting him to hasten to the farm.

The sight of the farmer's grief at the absence of his grandchild, and the misery his unjust accusations occasioned his daughter, induced me to solicit Mr. Hurst to think of some scheme by which it was possible they might receive intelligence of her; and, in compliance with his advice, advertisements were inserted in various London and country journals, but all were of none effect. Hannah Locksley never answered any of the earnest appeals made to her through them, and every one but her mother believed that she was dead.

Mrs. Locksley refused to listen to such an idea, and still clung to the hope that some day she would return sick and penitent. That thought was the stronghold which attached her to life, and for this she believed she should be spared; while the grandfather, having once consented to admit the probability of her death, appeared resigned to her loss, and appeared only intent in the disposition of his property—for which purpose Mr. Sanders, the solicitor, was closeted with him three or four times weekly.

It was in the first week of January Mrs. Headley had promised to visit us, and we were looking forward to the prospect of welcoming her, when the following letter from Maude put an end to our hopes of doing so for some time to come:

"My Dear Nelly—You will naturally imagine this letter is written to announce the day of our arrival at Brookfields; unfortunately, I am compelled to tell you that it is very uncertain when we shall be able to leave

home. My dear mother has met with an accident, from the effects of which she is not likely to recover for some time. Last week she had the misfortune to fall over Louis's pet cat, which was taking its *siesta* on the stairs. Not perceiving the animal, she placed her foot on its black back; and pussy, resenting such a liberty, rolled down the stairs. Mamma unfortunately rolling after her, dislocated her right ancle, and this injury will confine her to the sofa for a great many weeks.

"Thus you will perceive, Nelly, that the occasional residence of Louis Stainton here is most unlucky, and I heartily wish we were quit both of his cat and himself.

"But now comes the real gist of my letter. Mamma desires me to express her regret at not being able to pay her promised visit, and to ask you to spend here the time we hoped to have passed at Brookfields. Now do try and persuade Mrs. Travers to come to us. Be charitable, and remember that poor mamma is suffering severely from this *cat*astrophe, and will be very thankful for her society. I will bribe you to compliance with

my request by a bit of news, which has afforded me the most unqualified amazement. I yesterday walked over the cliffs to the Down Farm. The lady declared her delight at seeing me, as she had a wonderful piece of intelligence to communicate. Whatever it was, I could see it must be of a very sudden nature, for she had not read up for the occasion, but expressed herself more like my old friend Nancy the dairy-maid, than the refined Mrs. Hobbes:

"'Oh! Miss Maude, I be just so glad, that I don't know if I stand on my head or my heels; but I always knowed it would be so, though everybody always did run her down so: and now, to think of her coming back, a real lady, to pay me a visit. Oh, Lord, Lord! how shall I be able to treat a countess properly? Just read that letter, and see what has put me in such a fluster.'

"The letter was short enough to allow me to recollect its contents, and I transcribe them, my dear, for your benefit.

"'My kind Friend—I am sure you have

not forgotten you once loved Arabella; I judge your heart by my own, and therefore don't doubt the continuance of your affection, or the joy with which you will welcome my husband and myself. We will be with you to-morrow by the afternoon train, and hope to find my sweet friend as well as can be wished by her affectionate Arabella,

"'Countess D'Lanskoi.'

"No wonder the poor woman's head was turned by the approach of so much love and greatness in the person of the Countess D'Lanskoi. She was ready to laugh and weep in a breath, for in the midst of all her exultation and the real joy she felt at the prospect of beholding her long-lost friend, there was mingled indignation against 'honest John,' who had positively refused to make any alteration either in his dress or habits during the time his house was honoured by the presence of his distinguished guests.

"'And only think, Miss Maude, what my feelings must be, when I am obliged to intro-

duce John to his lordship dressed in his blue smock.'

"I laughed heartily at this climax to the woes of Mrs. Hobbes, and told her she must contrive to make the Count understand the obnoxious garment was the usual costume of English country gentlemen, and then ran away to escape the torrent of thanks showered on me for my admirable suggestion.

"But come, Nelly, and participate in the amusement I anticipate from the arrival of those illustrious strangers. Come and console my mother for her accident by your society. Come, and convince me that you continue to regard with affection your own true friend,

"MAUDE HEADLEY."

I was very grieved that the visit of Mrs. Headley was postponed for an indefinite period; but I did not feel the least disappointment when my mother refused to leave home again so shortly after her long absence from it. I therefore wrote to Maude, and told her of the refusal I was obliged to send to her request. Esther was expected home

in May, and I consoled myself for the deprivation of my friend's society by anticipating the delight I should feel in again beholding my dear sister. As I reviewed the events of the year which had just expired, I owned with gratitude how good and merciful God had been to me.

My diary for the new year opened with the following words:—

"January 1st.—Great have been the mercies vouchsafed me during the past year, although some dark clouds hovered over me when it opened; they dispersed without bursting, as I feared they would, on the heads of those I love.

"Esther restored to health, and happy in her husband's affections; my dear mother stronger in health, and more tranquil in mind than any time since my father's death; my young brothers well and happy, preparing themselves to commence the duties of their future life by diligent attention to their studies; and Henry removed from the scenes and companions which formerly exercised such pernicious influence over him, striving in

another land, by industry and integrity, to atone for his past errors. Myself relieved from the importunities of those I had such fearful reasons to dread, and a new source of happiness awakened in my heart by the friendship of Mrs. Headley and her family. May God mercifully enable me to complete this record of the present year with the words I yesterday added to that for the past—'All's well!' but if it be necessary that I should be tried by affection during it, may His grace enable me to say, 'Not my will, but Thine be done!'"

Before the end of January my mother's heart was gladdened by the receipt of a letter from Henry. In the trembling eagerness with which she took it from my hand, I beheld the evidence of the anxiety she had felt, although she had never suffered me to perceive it.

The letter was one which afforded her unmixed satisfaction. Henry was well and happy; the business in which he was engaged was most prosperous, the profits large, and certain; but owing to the recent death of one

of the partners, a large share of the capital was to be withdrawn from the concern. In order to obviate the necessity of admitting a stranger into the firm, it was resolved to supply the necessary funds from the resources of those who already had a share in the partnership. To this purpose, Henry said he had devoted every shilling of the money he had already realized; but it was insufficient for his share, and he earnestly entreated his mother to forward him one thousand pounds, for which she would receive more than three times the amount of interest she could possibly obtain by any mode of investment in England. Mr. Heath was now in Liverpool, actively engaged in making extensive purchases for the house, and the immediate advance of the sum he required would enable him to employ it advantageously for the benefit of the firm, of which he was the confidential agent. The letter concluded with expressions of devoted attachment to his mother, and each member of his family, as well as with the assurance that the aim of his life was to show by his present conduct how sincerely he repented of

the past, and that he looked forward to the time when he should return to his family, if not worthy of the affection he had always experienced, at least with the hope he might be considered purified from the stains of vices which had formerly degraded him.

"I do not see, Nelly," said my mother, "what objection there can be to comply with this request of Henry's. You see it will prove advantageous to ourselves, by assuring us larger interest for the money than we now obtain, so that, quite independent of your brother's welfare, we shall ourselves benefit from sending it to him; yet, I feel sure, Mr. Lancester will feel indignant if I act without consulting him; and I am equally sure he would oppose my lending this sum, for you perceive, Nelly, it is only a loan; and if I acted in accordance with his advice, it might prove a serious obstacle to Henry's success in life."

My mother looked at me imploringly, as if soliciting my sanction for doing that which her heart prompted; without hesitation, I answered,

"Of course, mamma, Henry must have this money at once; and let us hope it may be as serviceable, both to him and ourselves, as he anticipates; but I hope you will not consider it necessary to visit Liverpool yourself in order to deliver it to the agent. It may be safely transmitted through a banker."

"Certainly it may, dear. Indeed, I did not like the manners of Mr. Heath well enough to travel a second time so far to meet him. I can now write to Henry direct, as he has given the name of his firm, Sanderson, McLean, and Travers; his letter has no address beyond that of Montreal, but that is sufficient, as such a mercantile house must be well known there."

In a few days the money was procured and forwarded to Mr. Heath at Liverpool, who acknowledged its receipt in the following manner:—

"Respected Madam,—I have duly received from Messrs. A., bankers in this town, the sum for one thousand pounds, which I have placed to the credit of Mr. Henry

Travers, of the firm of Sanderson, McLean, and Travers, of Montreal,

"And am, respected Madam,

"Your obedient servant,

"ONIAS HEATH."

"Very prompt and businesslike," said my mother, as she read this brief acknowledgement of the thousand pounds. "Now, Nelly, I will write to Henry, and request the interest of it may be sent to us, if possible, half-yearly; it will be pleasant to speculate on the amount we may receive; I shall be disappointed if it is not double that we have been accustomed to. Don't you think, dear, that you may venture this quarter to repay Mr. Lancester the whole of the sum we are indebted to him for the purchase of the boat? I am not easy while under a pecuniary obligation, even to such an old friend."

I a little demurred at this proposal, but my mother made it appear so clear to herself, and after some little time to me also, that the interest of the money she had lent Henry must arrive at the expiration of six months,

and that most probably we had greatly underrated its amount, that I no longer objected to her filling a cheque for the debt, and enclosed it, as she requested, with thanks to her benevolent creditor, from whom I received, by return of post, the following letter:—

"Your mother must have very unkind thoughts of her old friend to be so eager to discharge a slight obligation, and that at the expense of personal inconvenience to herself. I feel rather hurt at the immediate payment of a debt which was not to have been liquidated for some time to come; however, I enclose the receipt with the usual thanks which accompany such documents.

"Cuthbert, whom I have just seen, tells me I was not bound to receive the money till the time for which it was lent had expired, and that I can legally claim interest till that date; but I will not prove such a severe creditor.

"My nephew is working very hard, and has already been retained in two cases as a 'junior,' but his profession is one in which he cannot hope to rise very rapidly. I tell

him he will be an old man before he is a young advocate, but he laughs at my forbodings, and points to the few exceptions to the general rule—the bright spots which have shone in the gloomy annals of briefless barristers—as those among whom he intends to rank himself. In the mean time, he works like a horse, and lives like an anchorite.

"Louis Stainton is still on the continent, but talks of returning to England shortly, when I hope he will take my advice, and marry—a thing Cuthbert cannot hope to do for many a long day.

"Adieu, Nelly. Tell your mother I pardon her dislike to lying under a trifling obligation to me, and believe how truly I am your friend.

"ROBERT LANCESTER.

"P. S.—I have just received a letter from Maude. I hope she does not bore you, as she does me, with the 'sayings and doings' of the mysterious foreigners at Dame Hobbes's."

Maude's letters had recently been filled with details respecting the visitors at the

Down Farm, and from her description of both Count and Countess, it appeared strange such people should continue week after week in so secluded a place, with no society but that of their hostess.

From Maude's description, the Count was good-looking, vulgar, and impudent, with a very badly assumed foreign accent, which sometimes was abandoned altogether, and then, if it was commented on, he flattered Mrs. Hobbes by attributing his facility in acquiring English to her own exquisite mode of speaking her native language; this lady was more magniloquent than ever, according to my friend, who found it very difficult to dismount her from the stilts on which she delighted to elevate herself and the English language.

My curiosity was likely to be set at rest on this topic, as far as Maude could gratify it, for Mrs. Headley could now totter about with the aid of a stick, and promised to pay us her long-deferred visit as soon as she was able to bear the fatigue of the journey.

## CHAPTER VIII.

THE arrival of Mrs. Headley and Maude, early in April, was a source of great pleasure to my mother, who was no longer depressed with ill-health, or languid in spirits; the exercise she had uniformly taken through the winter had benefitted both, and the freedom from the anxiety she had for years experienced on account of Henry and my sister dissipated, she appeared endowed with new life, and entered with cheerful alacrity into the little gaieties devised by Mrs. Hurst and myself for the recreation of our visitors.

At this time, too, she had the delight of receiving another affectionate letter from Henry, thanking her for the money she had

advanced him, and telling her that it had enabled him to stipulate for an additional share of the profits; the letter likewise promised that the interest of it should be punctually remitted half-yearly.

Maude was in excellent spirits during her stay with us, and regaled me with many comical descriptions relative to Mrs. Hobbes and her friends.

"I cannot imagine," she said, one day, when speaking of them, "what can detain them so long in a place which cannot present one object of interest to them. I used to think it was for the purpose of fleecing Mrs. Hobbes, but they appear to have plenty of money of their own; and the Count, who is frequently absent, returned lately with a really expensive bracelet, which Mrs. Hobbes exhibited with satisfaction on her plump, red arm. However, I ought to be thankful for such a fruitful source of amusement as I derive from Mrs. Hobbes and her friends—not that there is anything to laugh at in the Countess; there is occasionally something so fierce and cat-like in her expression, that I

recoil from her in alarm, and wonder more and more what motive it can be which keeps such a savage animal in so contracted a cage as the Down Farm."

But though Maude was communicative respecting those people, she avoided all my attempts to induce her to speak of Louis Stainton. Only once did I hear her mention his name, and that was in answer to some question of my mother's concerning him; then she said, gaily, she supposed he was coming home to take her uncle's advice, and marry, as soon as he had selected the lady to whom he intended throwing the handkerchief.

"You need not have looked so curiously, Nelly," she whispered, shortly after this speech; "I can think quite composedly of the future Mistress Stainton. Some diseases are cured by an over-dose of medicine, and such a dose I swallowed the night I see you still remember, I shall never suffer from an attack of the same malady."

With many causes for happiness, and few cares, it was no wonder the time passed

quickly and happily away. True, our amusements were of the most simple kind, but every day was productive of fresh enjoyment. Mr. Hurst was indefatigable in catering for our recreation, and had painted some fresh pictures for his cosmorama, all commemorative of some celebrated engagements, and, as he declared, all painted for Maude's especial delight, a compliment she returned by expressing her resolution never to marry till she could met with an artist equally gifted.

Occupied as I was while Mrs. Headley was with us, I did not neglect to pay frequent visits to Sandhill Farm. The farmer had never fully recovered from the fit which had followed his outburst of resentment against his daughter, some weeks previously, but, happily for her, his feelings had changed towards her from that time, and in her presenoe he never alluded to her child, to whose loss he appeared quite reconciled.

Whether he remembered and repented his former violence to his daughter, I could never ascertain, but he was now almost painfully

grateful for her affectionate devotion, and would frequently humbly entreat her to forgive him, when he allowed the natural irritability of his temper to break forth.

One morning, I received a message from Mrs. Locksley, begging me, if possible, to visit the farm that day. To my regret, I discovered that the old man was absent from his chair in the ingle, and the little maid who had been recently engaged to assist in the housework, informed me, "Master had had a fit in the night, and was unable to leave his bed."

My little informant went to tell her mistress of my arrival, and speedily returned with a request that I would be good enough to step up and see the farmer. I was met at the door of his chamber by Mrs. Locksley, who in a whisper entreated me to humour her father's fancies, and not endeavour to reason him out of the delusions under which he laboured.

When the patient saw me approaching the side of his bed, he cried out, "Oh! now we shall know the rights of it. Young madam,

I tell 'ee I saw Hannah standing by my bedside in the night, just where you be now, and when I cried out, and tried to catch hold of her, she said, 'Hush, if mother hears she'll send me away,' and just then Nanny came in with a light, and the poor lass hid herself somewhere or other, and won't come out again, call her as I may."

It was evident the old man was suffering from a violent attack of fever; his eyes sparkled, his face was flushed, and he appeared under the influence of wild, delirious fancies.

Shocked and terrified at the sight, I did not attempt to reply to the incoherent words he had addressed to me, while his daughter stood vainly trying to persuade him to swallow the medicine ordered for him by Mr. Neave.

"I want none of your doctor's stuff, Nanny, I wants my girl—I wants Hannah to come back to her poor old grandfather. Come out of thy hiding-place," he shouted, furiously; "there's none here shall harm thee. Come and tell me you don't deserve the hard names your own mother has given 'ee!—come and

take the will I have had made, and that nobody knows of!—come, and tell me you'll live in the old house when I am gone, and that the things I have loved all my life shan't go to rack and manger when I am in the churchyard! Oh! come!—come!—come!" The old man, as he uttered the last words, fell back exhausted on his pillow, but his face still wore the expression of one who is listening intensely for some hoped-for sound.

When convinced that no answer would be returned to his passionate entreaties, he turned a look of mingled reproach and anger on his weeping daughter, who again besought him to swallow the sedative she hoped would allay the fever.

"I'll take nought from thy hand," said he, "but if you'll go down, maybe I'll take it from young madam."

The poor woman gave me the glass, and stooping over the bed to kiss her father's forehead, left the room without a word; but what a world of anguish was there in the look she bestowed on the parent who again regarded her with dislike and suspicion. No

sooner were we alone than the farmer motioned me to bend over the bed, so that I might hear his now feeble voice.

"Oh, young madam," said he, with a piteous look, "think what your mother would feel if you was kept from her when she was dying, and how she would bless them as brought you to her; think of this, do'ee now, and find Hannah for me. She was here in the dead of night, looking cold, and ill, and poor, and yet she is afeard to show herself to her mother! Search round the place, and tell her to fear nothing, but to come and comfort her dying grandfather; he won't live long to trouble anyone."

In compliance with his wishes, I looked everywhere that it was possible to imagine a human being could be concealed, and when I told him how fruitless was the search, he with a deep sigh told me to look under his pillow for something he wished me to take charge of. I did so, and discovered a small key, with which he directed me to unlock an old-fashioned bureau which stood close to the bed. When I had opened it he pointed to a

small packet placed in one of the pigeon holes. I removed it, and gave it into his hands.

"This is a will I have had made a long time," said he, in a whisper, "and I left everything to Hannah in it; and I have made another one since, and never mentioned the poor girl's name in it, because I thought she was dead, but now that I have seen her, I mean this to be my *last* will. Take it, and let no one see it till you give it to the girl herself. She'll come back when she hears I am gone; she'll like to have one more look at her old grandfather before he is put under ground. Now mind, that's my will, no matter what other may be brought out by the lawyer, and you can swear I told you so."

He looked imploringly at me as he finished speaking, and taking my hands in his, pressed the small packet between them.

"Why not tell your daughter," I asked, not knowing how to refuse his request, yet having an invincible repugnance to comply with it.

"Because she would burn it or destroy it

somehow, and I should die with the thought in my heart that the girl I have loved as I never loved her mother, will be an outcast and a beggar, while the money I have scraped together through evil report and good report, for her sake, will be squandered on a pack of worthless canting beggars. No; you must swear you will give that paper to Hannah Locksley, if she ever crosses your path; promise me this as you hope to have the blessing of your own mother on her death-bed."

At this solemn adjuration, I gave the promise he required, and had just secreted the packet when his daughter, accompanied by Mr. Hurst, entered the room.

I never saw the old man again. A message from his daughter in the evening informed me that he had died an hour after I had quitted the house.

Within a week the farmer's funeral had taken place, his will read, and his daughter in undisputed possession of his hoarded wealth. The poor mother had made use of every means to discover her daughter's lurking

place, if she was, indeed, still in existence, but hitherto without effect; she had commissioned Mr. Sanders to advertise extensively, and to hold out every inducement for her to return, but weeks passed, and no intelligence was received of the castaway.

I must own that to myself this was a great relief. I was always haunted by the unpleasant idea that I might be compelled to dislodge from the comfortable homestead one who employed her ample means solely for the benefit of her suffering fellow-creatures, and place there as mistress one who would squander it in profligacy. These fears grew fainter day by day, till at last they were wholly forgotten.

The last evening of Mrs. Headley's stay had arrived, and we were to spend it at the Vicarage, though not for the purpose of admiring the Vicar's skill as an artist. Mr. Hurst was an accomplished reader, and to gratify Maude had consented to read aloud one of Shakespeare's dramas, the selection of it being left to the young lady. Early in the evening, therefore, we were seated round the

table, each of us furnished with some kind of work, in order that our fingers might be occupied as well as our thoughts; this was in compliance with the wishes of the elder Mrs. Hurst, who could not endure to see "people sitting with their hands before them," and whose own knitting needles appeared to move by instinct, so little did they engage either the eyes or the attention of the venerable worker.

I do not think Mr. Hurst much approved of our industry on such occasions, for before he commenced he begged we would provide ourselves with a supply of needles, so that if any of the party dropped that little implement, he might not have to cease reading during the time it was hunted after.

I never yet knew a gentleman who liked to see needlework of any kind strewed on the drawing-room table in the evening. Mr. Hurst had a particular objection to the sight, and declared that when he was occupied either in reading or writing, the report of a pistol would not annoy him as much as the

peculiar click made by the scissors as they were lifted from or replaced on the table.

For myself, I always considered if a reader was worth listening to, he was worth looking at. Mr. Hurst's face was as full of expression as his voice, and equally portrayed the passions and sentiments he brought before us from the magic treasury of the author. My work was, therefore, only taken for form's sake; it remained unnoticed on the table, while "transported beyond this ignorant present," I sat without one thought but of those who were made visible to my mind's eye by the marvellous skill of the reader. Maude's selection for that evening was the "Merchant of Venice," and I believe in her heart she was as much impressed as myself by the manner in which Mr. Hurst had interpreted that exquisite drama, but her dislike to everything she chose to designate as enthusiasm, caused her to banter me during our walk home on the attention I had bestowed on the reader.

"Oh! my dear, if you could but have seen your rapt face as Mr. Hurst repeated the

beautiful lines Shakespeare has put into the mouth of that wretched sneak, Lorenzo; you were far away from that cosy room; you were seated on the moonlit bank on which the married lovers were gazing; and when the volume was closed you were still in the garden of Portia. How long you would have remained there I don't know if I had not given your arm that sly pinch."

"For which, Maude, my arm still suffers; but I would willingly forgive you if it were not for the profane manner in which you speak of Shakespeare."

"I speak profanely of the 'divine William!' what do you mean, Nelly?"

"Why, did you not call Lorenzo a sneak?"

"To be sure I did; but is that speaking disrespectfully of Shakespeare? Is not Lorenzo a sneak; and for the matter of that, so is his friend, Bassanio; are they not a couple of arrant fortune hunters? The one encourages a girl to rob her father, and the other borrows money confessedly for the purpose of making a splendid appearance in the eyes of the woman by whose wealth he hopes to

retrieve his own ruined fortunes. I must say, with all my love for Shakespeare, that he very rarely gives us the picture of a gentleman. We have a fine character of Porteus, yet, after all, what does he prove but false to his mistress, and a traitor to the friend who had proclaimed him

> ' Complete in feature and in mind,
> With all good grace to grace a gentleman.'

" Valentine himself is one of the few gentlemen Shakespeare has drawn. I suppose they were scarce articles in the reigns of Elizabeth and James."

The next morning our friends quitted us, after obtaining from my mother a promise to visit Baymouth early in the autumn.

We were now in daily expectation of Esther's arrival. She was to spend the summer at Brookfields, while Gerald was to occupy himself in arranging her home in London. They were to visit Germany on their return to England, for the purpose of my brother's accompanying them home, and this occasioned them to remain absent a

month longer than the time appointed for their return. When they did arrive, I could hardly believe it was Esther who threw herself into my arms as I stood at the gate to receive the travellers.

Lovely beyond my expectations, although they had been highly excited by Gerald's letters, blooming with health and radiant with happiness, it was difficult to imagine she could be the same creature I had for years been accustomed to regard with such pitying affection.

"I don't wonder you are surprised, mamma," said Gerald, as my mother gazed with admiration on his beautiful wife. I thought you would renounce your old heresy when you beheld her, and confess there is more virtue in sunny skies and balmy air, than in close rooms and a foggy climate. I took away a fragile lily, and have brought you back a blooming rose."

There was likewise a marked improvement in my brother Walter, now a fine high-spirited manly youth of eighteen, delighted at being released from his school-boy exist-

ence, and eager to commence at once, under the auspices of Gerald, the profession he had chosen.

Edmund murmured at having to pass two more years of pupilage before he proceeded to college, to qualify himself for taking holy orders. From a boy he had declared he would be a "pulpit" man, and his father always hoped that when old enough to make choice of his future career, he would continue firm to his boyish predilections.

The expense attending the choice of such a profession, had been the only drawback to my satisfaction, when he had told me of his wishes; but now that, owing to Mr. Lancester's judicious management, our income had been restored nearly to its original amount, and we had the chance of increasing it through the medium of Henry's commercial transactions, I was relieved from all apprehensions on that point, and it was with unmixed pleasure I looked forward to the time when, an ordained minister of God, I might look up to my dear brother as to a friend and pastor.

## CHAPTER IX.

My mother's pleasure at the restoration of my sister, was to some extent marred by the reflection she would soon be removed from her, that she was a stranger and sojourner in the place which was formerly her home.

"Dear mamma," answered Esther, in reply to some observation in which these ideas were conveyed, "I wonder that you do not yourself feel how very elastic the heart is. It would be worth very little if it was not capable of expansion; if a new affection must necessarily expel those which previously filled it. Home ties are as dear, or dearer to myself than ever."

"I suppose then, Esther," said I, "that as one of those home ties, I must imagine

you mean to say, 'I could not love you, dear, so much, loved I not Gerald more.'"

"To be sure, Nelly, that is my meaning, although mamma and you do not appear to comprehend it."

"I will try," answered I, dryly; "perhaps it will be easier to learn the lesson now Gerald is absent."

In August, my mother received the following letter from Mr. Heath, enclosing a cheque on a bank at Liverpool, for forty-five pounds. It was remitted punctually to the time fixed by Henry for the payment of the interest.

"RESPECTED MADAM—I am desired by Mr. Henry Travers to forward you a cheque for forty-five pounds, being six months interest on the sum of one thousand pounds invested by you in the firm of Sanderson, McLean, and Co., and for which I request you will forward a receipt to your humble servant,

"ONIAS HEATH."

"— Hotel, Liverpool."

My mother was in a perfect flutter of happiness when she received this welcome letter. Now she could tell Mr. Lancester, who with Gerald was to arrive the following day, of what she had done. Now, she could show Esther's husband, that Henry was a brother he could love and esteem. In the excess of her joy, she even forgot her repugnance to the agent through whose hands this good fortune had passed, and commissioned me to write and invite him to visit us at Brookfields, and personally receive her thanks for the promptitude with which he had forwarded her the money.

To my satisfaction, this was declined, on the plea of a great pressure of business, but though the letter of the trusted agent did not announce his acceptance of my mother's proffered hospitality, it contained intelligence much more welcome. Henry had been too much engaged to write when Mr. Heath had quitted Montreal, but a packet of letters was expected by him daily, and those for my mother would be despatched to her the moment they arrived.

When the good news was communicated to Gerald, he said, "He always felt sure Esther's brother would turn out a good fellow after all;" but Mr. Lancester shook his head, and said, "Sure grains, were small gains." No one, however, would agree with him in thinking it a misfortune to receive forty-five pounds instead of less than twenty, and Gerald advised Walter to exchange the lancet for the desk, and enter as a partner in the house of Sanderson and Company.

In less than a fortnight the promised letter was forwarded from Liverpool. Everything was prospering with the writer, and the senior partner had recently hinted to him that it was possible they might allow him an increased share of the business if he chose to place a further sum in the concern, and he hoped he might receive the permission to do so before Mr. Heath left Liverpool, as he would have an opportunity of employing it to the best advantage while in England.

"Think, dearest mother, what a delight it will be to me to discharge some part of my heavy debt to you, and be the means of in-

creasing your income through the confidence placed in me by those who have daily opportunities of observing my character."

My mother shed many joyful tears over this assurance of her son's reformation, and when, not long after, she had another epistle containing the intelligence that his indulgent partners had consented he should place a further sum of two thousand pounds in the firm, even Mr. Lancester withdrew all his opposition to my mother's abstracting her money from the funds, and went himself to town in order to expedite the transfer. A few days after, a brief business-like acknowledgment of its receipt arrived from Mr. Heath.

Gerald did not carry Esther to the pretty home he had prepared for her till the conclusion of September.

The parting between my mother and sister was not so painful as I had anticipated: it was brightened by the hope of a speedy reunion. The Christmas was to be passed together either in Brookfields or in London, and I had not much doubt as to which locality

would be selected. Esther was eager to play the part of hostess in "a home of her own" —that paradise in the imagination of every young wife.

Walter accompanied Gerald and his sister; and as no plans had yet been formed for Edmund, Mr. Hurst had offered to receive him as a pupil at the Vicarage during the time we were to spend at Baymouth.

Without one thought of anxiety for the future, I quitted Brookfields a few days after my sister had departed, and when we arrived at the station at N——, to my surprise, I found both Cuthbert and Louis Stainton waiting to receive us.

In the last letter I had received from Maude, she had told me they intended to spend the autumn in Ireland, and most probably would not return till after Christmas.

"We have altered our plans," said Cuthbert, in reply to my mother's expressions of surprise at beholding them, "and intend remaining here till the end of October, and then going to Vienna for a fortnight or three weeks. I have always spent some part of

the long vacation with my mother, and Stainton is good-natured enough to give up his own wishes to mine."

I wished, with all my heart, that Louis had not returned to Baymouth till he had brought a wife with him. Maude had, apparently, completely vanquished the feelings she once entertained for him; but I feared the more effectually to conceal she had ever felt them, she would assume a cold repulsive manner to him, likely to wound her brother as well as his friend.

I was quite wrong in this supposition. It was the gentleman who was silent and reserved, while Maude treated him with the affectionate familiarity of a sister.

This conduct was only to be accounted for by supposing he had not forgiven her fit of petulance the evening before he last quitted Baymouth, while she endeavoured, by her present cordiality, to erase it from his recollection.

One of the first visits paid by my mother and myself after our arrival, was to the cottage of the Widow Simpson. The mother was the only

person within it when we entered, and I could with difficulty recognise in the cheerful-looking, neatly-attired woman, who welcomed my mother with tears of gratitude, the miserable object I had first seen shivering with ague in the wretched hut in the cliff. The cottage they now inhabited contained but four rooms, and was very humbly furnished: but the brightness and cleanliness of the whole place gave it an air of comfort rarely to be met with in the homes of the fishers on that part of the coast.

Everything had prospered with the poor woman and her children since my mother's benevolence had afforded the eldest son the means of providing for the family. Ned had borne the amputation of his leg bravely; and sustained by hope for the future, and the joy of witnessing the happiness and comfort of all around him, was able to rise from his bed and use his crutches weeks before the kind surgeon had anticipated. Jos had saved the five pounds for which old Anderson, the basket-maker at Hinchford, was to instruct him in his art; and he was to commence as

soon as he was strong enough to dispense with his mother's care. In the meantime he attended diligently the village school, where his attention and industry had won for him the regard of his instructors.

Little Betsy had likewise obtained the height of her ambition, to her own delight and that of her friends. She was installed as parlour-maid at the Down Farm, and had the honour of personally attending on the grand Countess.

Then the younger ones, with the exception of little Charley, all went decently clothed to the infant school; and even that youngest—the delight of its mother's heart—would be able to accompany them there the following summer.

Tom, under the tuition of his elder brother, was becoming a fine bold lad, who would soon be able to earn sufficient for his own maintenance.

"So you see, ma'am," said the happy mother, when she had concluded the enumeration of her blessings, "I shall have plenty of time to work, and not be obliged to lean

quite so hard on poor Jos, who, though he is as good a son as ever trimmed a sail, may some day want to have a wife and home of his own. So if I can help a bit, we'll may be, by and by, be able to put a few shillings now and then in the savings'-bank. It's a great comfort to a poor man when he's got a trifle in hand to begin the world with. It's ill eating your herring before it's out of the sea, and that's what many a poor fisher has to do. He sells his fish before he goes out to catch 'em, and then thinks it hard when he brings 'em in to see another waiting to carry 'em away."

Amongst the good woman's subjects for congratulation, during the past winter, was the number of wrecks which had taken place on that part of the coast.

I was shocked to hear her speak of the loss of one large vessel laden with coals as a "Godsend." The children, at low water, had collected as much as two tons from the sands, as well as a quantity of wood. And, besides this piece of good luck, Jos's boat had been actively employed in bringing the crew

and part of the freight from the disabled vessel.

"La, miss!" said the widow, when she noticed my suprise at the manner in which she spoke of such an awful calamity, "if ships must go ashore, it's something to be grateful for that they are driven here. You'll find everybody will talk as I do about 'em. Why a winter is called lucky or unlucky according to the number of vessels that are wrecked hereabouts. It wouldn't be human nature if we weren't glad of such chances."

When we returned home, Maude asked me whether I was not satisfied with the results of my mother's benevolence to the Simpsons. She told me "all the beach" was talking of Jos Simpson's good luck, and that they had made more money by wrecking than any other family on the coast.

"I know it, Maude, and I have been both shocked and indignant at hearing it called a 'lucky winter' on that account."

"It is shocking, Nelly; but, after all, can we condemn them for eagerly taking advantage of the wealth thrown to their very doors by

the waves. Accustomed from infancy to behold the frightful scenes which, alas! occur so frequently, all feeling is blunted before they are old enough to assist in gathering the spoils. From their earliest recollection, the fire which warms them and the food which satisfies their hunger during the inclemency of winter, are furnished by the destruction of the lives and property of others. I do not believe that any wrecker, on this part of the coast, would steal the value of a penny from the person of any poor creature who might be thrown alive or dead on the shore; but you cannot prevent them thinking it 'luck,' when they risk their own lives to carry assistance to a vessel in distress, or to forbear rejoicing when the ebbing tide shows them the treasures which the storm has brought to their doors."

"It may be as you say, Maude, all very natural such feelings should exist. I only know that I shivered and drew back from the glowing fire when I heard the manner in which the fuel had been obtained."

"But did Mrs. Simpson tell you of the

hours of toil, of the wet, cold, and hunger her children endured before it was lodged in her humble home? In one cottage I entered, a poor boy had suffered severely for weeks, in consequence of his exposure to the weather while digging with his bare hands in the sands for some of the coals from whose heat you drew back in horror. It would be just as reasonable to feel sick at the sight of a leg of mutton because it was an act of cruelty in the butcher to slaughter it. You know, Nelly, sentiment of any sort is not my *forte*. To-morrow you must go with me to witness a comedy enacted at the Down Farm."

My curiosity respecting the visitors at Mrs. Hobbes's was not to be gratified as quickly as I imagined. When we visited that lady, we were informed that the 'Countess' had left the house on business that morning, which was likely to detain her for some weeks, and that the Count, who was very unwell, had promised her not to leave his room for some days.

"It was beautiful," said Mrs. Hobbes, "to

see the affection which subsisted between the noble pair."

"They contrive to exist apart very frequently," said Maude, "attached as they are to each other. Any one would suppose they must have some wonderful amount of treasure hid in your house, and one of them always remained to keep watch and ward over it."

I was surprised to see that at this remark Mrs. Hobbes coloured violently, and said "Miss Maude was always fond of talking nonsense. What treasure was it likely they wanted to hide in her house? But, no doubt, people made up all kinds of stories about her friends."

And forthwith she launched forth into enthusiastic praises of the rank and elegance of her visitors, as well as their extreme regard for herself, in proof of which she exhibited the very handsome bracelet the Count had brought her the last time he had visited London.

"What a pity it is," said Maude, "that you do not have home your daughters to

profit by the society of your accomplished friend!"

This was a home thrust to the vain, weak woman, as she answered, passionately, "That John Hobbes was a brute; that he did not like the Countess and her husband, and insisted his daughters should not enter the house while they remained in it."

"Then I think, Mrs. Hobbes, the best thing you can do is to get rid of them at once. Surely, your own children must be dearer to you than these strangers?"

At this moment there was a sound as of some one moving in the next room, and with the exclamation of "Good gracious! can that door be unlocked?" she rushed from the apartment.

We looked at each other in amazement. That Mrs. Hobbes had left us in great terror of some kind was evident, and while we asked each other, in whispers, what it could be, we heard her voice in the adjoining room, as if addressing some person in imploring accents, "Now do—pray do, there's a good creature, go back to your own room; then, if you

won't, I must make'ee:" a sort of scuffling noise was heard for a minute or two, and then Mrs. Hobbes returned, and apologized for leaving us, on the ground that one of the servants was ill, and would persist in leaving her bed.

There was such confusion in the manner of the lady, that Maude's curiosity was awakened, and after we had been duly ushered to the front door by Betsey Simpson, she signified her intention of going round to the kitchen, and trying to see the master of the farm, "for I hope, Nelly, it will not prove she has confined him under lock and key in his own house."

There was no cause for alarm respecting the honest farmer; he was sitting by a blazing fire comfortably taking his tea, while at a little distance were seated all the servants of the house, with the exception of Betsey.

We received a kindly greeting from the honest man, who expressed himself very glad to see me again, and complimented my appearance, by telling me I was looking "uncommon well, sure." He then, greatly to

Maude's amusement, inquired how his missus was.

"An odd question," Mr. Hobbes, said the young lady, in reply, "to ask a visitor. Have you not seen your wife to-day?"

"I have not spoken to her for two months, Miss Maude," said he, sternly, "nor ever will as long as she harbours those varment in the place. If it was not for the sake of my girls, I would start off, and never come anigh the farm again; but I want to keep a decent home for them."

At the mention of his daughters, his eyes filled with tears, and Maude, who sincerely respected him, sympathized with his emotion.

"Never fear," she whispered, "your wife will discover her mistake in time; but you should not speak of her in such a manner before your servants."

"It don't matter," answered he, in the same tone; "they all know about our quarrel, and I believe one of these days they will duck the Count in the horse-pond, if he don't behave a little civiller to 'em than he has done lately."

"I have discovered one thing," said Maude, after we had quitted the farm, "and that is, Mrs. Hobbes, as I suspected, told a falsehood respecting the sick servant, for they were every one in the kitchen. It must have been the 'Count' she was trying to coax back into confinement; I suppose the 'Countess' thinks it is the safest plan to lock him up when she is absent."

This visit to Baymouth was not so pleasant as my former one had proved. I was considerably puzzled by the manner in which Louis repulsed Maude's attempts to resume her former sisterly familiarity with him. He avoided her society as much as possible, and rarely was prevailed on by Cuthbert to accompany us in the long rambles we were in the habit of taking over the Downs, or on the sands. When he did so, he invariably contrived that I should be his companion, either in advance or some little distance in the rear of the others. He was with me lively and entertaining as ever, but I could not avoid noticing that whenever I made Maude the subject of conversation, he either remained

silent, or answered in a manner which convinced me he did not wish to allude to her.

Is it possible, thought I, when he had replied almost rudely to some remark I had made respecting her, that a man's vanity is so intense that when once wounded, he never forgives the person who has inflicted the injury. Surely this pitiable exhibition of *pique* must eradicate every trace of partiality from Maude's heart. I had deemed her unjust when she uttered that bitter reproof, for I never believed that, infatuated as she was, she had taken the true measure of his character. He is unworthy of the sisterly affection she is now anxious to bestow on him.

I could see that Cuthbert felt hurt when he sometimes could not but observe his friend's avoidance of his sister; but as Maude never appeared to notice it herself, there was no excuse for alluding to it; but I was wrong in supposing her indifferent to the altered manner of Louis.

One day he excused himself from walking with us when Cuthbert was too busy letter writing to accompany us as usual.

"You see, Nelly," said she, with a faint smile, "he will even forego your society rather than have it encumbered with mine."

I started with painful surprize as she laid an emphasis on the words "your society;" was it possible she could entertain a suspicion that I was an object of more than friendly regard to Mr. Stainton?

"Don't look so startled, Nelly," continued she. "Surely—surely you must be conscious of his love for yourself; what else can account for his constant solicitude respecting you—his anxiety to be by your side—his reluctance to leave Baymouth, although Cuthbert wishes to do so at once? Don't think I am either jealous or grieved at what I saw the probability of from the very first day that you met? and prophets always feel pleasure when their predictions are realized."

"I should be very grieved, Maude, if your supposition was a correct one, as I could never regard Mr. Stainton otherwise than a friend; and I am confident he only regards me in a similar manner. He seeks my society simply because he is still angry with yourself,

a fact which certainly does not raise him in my estimation."

Maude looked searchingly in my face as I spoke.

"Then, Nelly, if you do not deceive yourself as to the state of your heart, I have committed a grievous injury to Louis. Had he been on the same terms of brotherly affection with myself as formerly, he would not have been exposed to the danger of constant intercourse with you."

I was annoyed at this absurd idea of Maude's, and do all I could to prevent it, I felt myself looking confused and silly when I next met Louis, and what was still worse, his evident mortification when I managed to evade being his companion as frequently as formerly, gave some show of plausibility to Maude's suggestions. Another thing, too, vexed me; whenever Cuthbert happened to be conversing with me, he invariably quitted my side the moment Mr. Stainton appeared, as if he recognized his friend's right to supplant him.

In order to escape the annoyance of seem-

ing to give a tacit consent to such folly, I abandoned walking unless in company with my mother or Mrs. Headley, and spent a considerable portion of my time in my own room.

What could be more ridiculous than associating with persons who would persist in thinking a man devoted to me who had never by word or look given the slightest ground for such a supposition. I was angry with Maude for having mentioned such absurdity, with Louis that his pique against her had given rise to it, with myself for being vexed at it, and, above all, with Cuthbert for acting as if he believed it.

Louis, wholly ignorant of my motives for avoiding him, without the slightest idea that he was looked upon as a lovelorn swain, who could not exist out of the society of his mistress, innocently persisted in walking by my side whenever he had an opportunity, in asking me to play picquet or chess of an evening, or conversing with me respecting the merits of the books we read; in short, he behaved in the same natural, friendly manner he had ever

done towards me: and when he became aware that I endeavoured to evade his society, he claimed—like the straightforward gentleman he was—openly to know the cause of my alteration of manner towards him, and expressed his regret if in any way he had been unfortunate enough to offend me. If I had ever experienced the slightest doubt as to the nature of his regard for me, this must have dispelled it; his manner, though it showed him hurt by my capricious change of conduct, was as unembarrassed as if addressing a friend of his own sex, but at the same time there was something in the way in which he entreated me to forgive his unknown offence, which induced me to retract the harsh judgment I had recently passed on his character.

"Do not, Miss Travers, withdraw the friendship with which you formerly honoured me; I have so few friends, that I cannot afford to lose one of the most valued. I am, indeed, most unfortunate in caring for those who have neither love nor esteem to bestow on me. I know not why, but even Cuthbert's regard seems cooled of late, and I hesitate to accom-

pany him abroad, in the fear that he may not wish for my companionship. As to his sister, you are no stranger to her real sentiments respecting me, although I am aware she regrets having wounded me by expressing them, and endeavours to atone for their betrayal by the kindness she now shows me."

"You wrong yourself and your friends by such thoughts," answered I, glad to escape his particular charge against myself by defending the brother and sister from his unjust accusations. "I am quite sure Maude repents her petulance on the night to which you have alluded, and which, pardon me for saying, I should have thought a nature so generous as your own must long since have forgotten. I can assure you, that Mr. Headley labours under the impression you do not care to be his companion in the excursions which you have mentioned."

"Has Cuthbert spoken to you on the subject?" asked he, eagerly.

I answered that it was from Maude I had received the information.

"Then I am afraid it is only her wish to

hasten my departure which induces her to think so. It is most unfortunate I am compelled to intrude where my presence is unwelcome."

"Why are you compelled?" said I, surprised at his words.

"Can you not guess, Miss Travers? I am sure Maude has told you on what conditions her mother consents to inhabit this house. If I did not occasionally make use of the rooms appropriated to me, she would, I fear, refuse to continue its occupant, and then I should feel bereaved of every tie which binds me to existence. You, Miss Travers," continued he, passionately, "who have all your life been surrounded by loving relatives —who have from infancy possessed the blessings of home and kindred—can hardly imagine my isolation. There is not one human being existing with whom I can claim affinity. An only child—left an orphan before I was old enough to comprehend the misery that word expresses—a sickly, peevish child, with barely sufficient means to defray the cost of a decent education, I was received into the family of

Mr. Headley. Treated as his son, brought up in brotherly union with his children, I knew no other home, I wished for no other love than that bestowed on me by those who had admitted me into that blessed haven of peace and happiness. When old enough to think of the future, I chose the same career as that selected by Cuthbert. Together we departed from our common home, together studied a profession which both hoped would lead us to fame and fortune; but at the moment when this dream of the future was at the brightest, I inherited wealth which rendered all personal exertion a mockery. I received it joyfully, for I had no thought but that it would be freely shared by those I loved, but, to my bitter sorrow, I found that could not be; its fruits were to sever the link which bound me to the only home I had ever known. When Mr. Headley's death obliged his widow and daughter to leave the parsonage, and subsist on a very scanty income, I implored them, by the kindness they had ever shown me, by the love I bore the memory of the dear friend whose loss they

deplored, to consider me as a son and brother, and as such be allowed the privilege of contributing to their comfort. But no; the deep gulf which divided the rich man and Lazarus was between us, and while their hearts were full of love to each other, they refused one drop to alleviate the pangs of him who hungered and thirsted for a little of the blessing they possessed in abundance; still, if not loved as a son and brother, I fancied I was admitted to the privilege of a friend, and it was not till Maude ruthlessly tore the veil aside that I became conscious what slight claim I had to the title."

I was too much astonished and affected by the passionate vehemence of his words, to break for some minutes the silence which followed this outburst of feeling. He did so himself.

"Forgive me, Miss Travers, for my egotistical folly. It is the first time I have ever suffered my tongue to give expression to the feelings of my heart, and it shall be the last, but your recent behaviour caused me to fear I was to be deprived of the friendly intercourse which has been my only solace during

the last few weeks. Wholly ignorant of what had occasioned your displeasure, was it not natural I should strive to ascertain the reason? and in the fear of having lost your esteem, have shown you how keenly I feel the estrangement of those who once treated me as a brother."

"And they do regard you as such," said I, deeply moved by his emotion "I do not believe Cuthbert could love you more, even if you really stood in that relation to him; and as for Maude....." I hesitated a moment after I had uttered the last word, uncertain how far I was justified in assuring him of her regard.

"Go on!—go on!—why do you stop at the mention of Maude's name? is it because you fear to wound me by the knowledge of her contempt, or of her utter indifference towards me? Speak!—pray speak!—do not keep me in this suspense."

He had taken my hand, as if the more earnestly to implore me to finish my sentence, and at the very moment I was about to do

so, the door opened, and Maude advanced a few paces into the room.

She remained an instant gazing, as we stood, my hand still in Louis Stainton's, and then muttering a few words as if of apology for her intrusion, she quitted the room before I had time to address her.

Poor Maude! thought I, as I hastened after her, she thinks she has discovered my falsehood, and that I was calmly listening to words of affection from Louis; I shall have some difficulty, I fear, in convincing her to the contrary.

She was not in her room when I entered it in search of her, nor was it till a few minutes before the dinner hour she made her appearance in the house. She had been rambling over the cliffs, she told me, in an indifferent tone, and when I reproached her for not asking me to accompany her, she said,

"I sought you for that purpose, but when I saw the manner you were engaged, you cannot be surprised I refrained from doing so. Now, don't, Nelly," cried she, with a quivering lip, as she saw I was about to

reply, "no, do not attempt any explanation. It was natural that you should not know the state of your heart till it was put to the proof. God bless you, my darling! and may your future life be unclouded by any sorrow darker than his love will enable you to bear with fortitude!"

Amazed and angry, both with her and myself, I had soon the further mortification of perceiving from Cuthbert's manner—a manner I could not define, yet was perfectly able to distinguish—that his sister had acquainted him with what she imagined the events of the morning; so I sat down to table by the side of a man who had not two hours back told me he had not an atom of affection for me beyond friendly regard, and, at the same time, with the consciousness that two pairs of eyes were so blinded by misconception, that they beheld lover-like attention even in the tone in which I was asked whether I would "take bacon with my chicken."

It was in vain during the remainder of the day I sought an opportunity of undeceiving Maude, and, through her, Cuth-

bert; she pertinaciously avoided being a moment alone with me, while Louis, who appeared to consider his confidence in the morning had established a bond of intelligence between us, persisted in carrying on a whispered conversation with me, the sole topic of which was his doubts and fears relative to the estimation in which he was held by those who had so generously bestowed my unworthy self on him as a betrothed bride.

Though this folly lasted through the evening, I resolved it should be dissipated before I slept. But in vain were my resolutions; Maude evaded them by pleading headache, and retiring to bed quite early, and when I insisted on leaving the room with her, she implored me so piteously to spare her aching brain that night, and leave anything I wished to tell her till the morning, that I had no resource but to obey her.

Day after day passed, and still left me incapable of dispelling the illusion under which Maude persisted in remaining, and Cuthbert continued to treat me with the grave courtesy

I concluded he considered proper to my future exalted position.

At last my indignation became roused at this wilful persistence in folly, and I determined I would no longer try to dispel it, satisfied that I was wholly guiltless of the duplicity with which I felt certain Maude accused me in her heart, I quietly acquiesced in the arrangements which left me the constant companion of Louis Stainton.

One day, during the time this comedy of "Much Ado about Nothing" was being enacted, I contrived to escape from all the party, and started by myself for a walk to the cottage of Mrs. Simpson, whom I found in great perplexity concerning a message to her daughter Betsey, which had been just left for her by the Vicar, relative to the confirmation, for which that young lady was preparing herself. As all the children were from home, I proffered to deliver it for her, saying that as I intended returning over the cliffs, it would be very little out of my way to do so.

When almost within sight of the farm, I

saw a man with his back towards me, negligently leaning against a stile I had to cross; he turned round at the sound of my footsteps, and I found myself once more gazing on the hateful face of Jasper Coxe.

With a scream of horror I prepared to rush from the spot, but the wretch, seizing me by the dress, forcibly detained me.

"Well, this is a bit of good luck I scarcely expected," said he, audaciously: I have been longing to see you again, my pretty rosebud, for this many a day, and though I knew you were here, I was afraid I should never catch you by yourself. That jealous Rachel made me promise to keep out of your way, but you have put yourself in it, my dear, and, by Jove, I will make the best use of the opportunity. What do you say to our starting together on a trip? I have got plenty of money, and I will take you wherever you like."

"Let me go," said I, as I vainly endeavoured to free myself from his hold, "let me go, or I will scream till assistance reaches me."

"Oh! will you so?" was his answer, "I

am glad you have told me, my darling, what you will do"—then, placing one hand on my mouth, he moved me with the other from the ground, and carried me a considerable distance farther from the farm.

"Now, holloa if you like," said he, "I don't think anybody will hear you here, but before you begin, just listen to me. Don't forget, if you please, that I can put my friend Harry in Newgate, whenever I like. I have played Rachel's game in this affair, hitherto; but now I mean to hold the cards myself. I am tired of her ill temper, and should like nothing better than to run away from it for a time; so I ask you, for the second time, if you will go with me. Just leave a bit of a note behind you to say you are gone to foreign parts with an old friend, and I dare say nobody will think it worth while to hunt you up."

All the time he was speaking he held me round the waist with an iron clutch, and laughed aloud at my frantic efforts to release myself from his detested touch. Utterly ex-

hausted by my vain screams for help, I was compelled for awhile to remain quiet; but as I listened to his insulting language, despair restored my strength, and again I screamed loudly for aid. This time it was at hand. I felt myself suddenly torn from the wretch's grasp, and in the arms of Cuthbert Headley.

"What is the meaning of this outrage?" he demanded, while every nerve trembled with passion, "how dare you insult this lady by your vile touch? Begone, this moment, or I will chastise you as I would a cur."

The man turned white either with rage or fear, and seemed as if about to obey the commands he had received, but suddenly stopped and said, with a malignant laugh:

"So you have got a new sweetheart, have you, my pretty Nelly? Have you ever told him of the pleasant meetings we used to have of a night at the bottom of the garden at Brookfields, when your mother was in bed and asleep? Don't look so bashful at my mentioning them, my dear."

Cuthbert extricated himself from my hold, and sprang towards the man who shouted:

"Come on, and have a fight if you like! but just ask her if I have not spoken the truth! Look at her," he added, triumphantly, "that's enough! Does she look as if she dare deny it?"

I hid my face in my hands to hide the burning blush of shame which these infamous words had called to my cheeks. A short silence followed them, and I heard the footsteps of the man as if he was retreating from the spot. Presently my hands were removed from my face by Cuthbert, who gazed searchingly at me:

"Tell me," he asked, in a trembling voice, "whether it is possible that vile creature could have spoken the truth—that you have ever held intercourse of any kind with him."

"It is true," said I, in a faltering voice, "that I have met him as he says—but hear me—oh! Cuthbert, hear me"—for he turned from me as if about to depart—"I met him, but it was in fear and trembling, and to avert a terrible calamity from falling on all I loved on earth. He held—he still holds—a fatal power over me, but bitter as the bondage has

hitherto proved, it never caused me to feel such anguish as now, when I perceive his vile calumnies are believed by one whom I hoped regarded me as a friend."

"May God forgive you, Nelly," said he, in a voice full of emotion, "if you have done aught which could give that man power to say the words he has just uttered. I have felt for some time that my future life would be a desolate one, but I did not envy Louis his happiness. I could bear to see you his wife, but not to know you are unworthy the place he has given you in his noble heart."

Conflicting feelings of joy and agony assailed me as I listened to this avowal of Cuthbert's love. I had never tried to analyze my heart; I had cowardly shrunk from doing so, although a secret consciousness occasionally visited me. But now I knew that I loved him; that the vows I had so often made to myself and others, of living wholly for my mother, were empty words. I loved with the whole passionate energy of my nature, and I felt that to live under the degrading suspicion those vile words had conveyed to the

mind of him to whom I had given my heart, was a greater trial than I could bear. He had waited patiently for a reply to his last words, and finding I did not speak, he made a movement as if to leave me. Thank God, tears came to my relief, and I sobbed aloud. Then he once more approached me, and taking my hand, implored me to confide to him the secret of my connexion with the base wretch who had so grossly insulted me. He called me by the most endearing names; repeated that without me life was not worth preserving; but that deprived of happiness himself, he would rejoice in beholding mine.

"Oh! Nelly," cried he, wildly, "you would despise me if you knew the wicked feelings my love for you has created in my heart. At first I hated Louis—hated yourself—but I have learned to conquer such mad feelings, and schooled myself to think of you as the wife of my friend—of him I loved as a brother. I determined no eye should ever witness my weakness, and now that I have suffered you to see it, pardon it for the sake of him in whose name I ask you to disprove

the words of the man who has just quitted us."

"I cannot," said I, aroused to exertion by the conflicting feelings which agitated me, "I have told you that I have met this man before, and at night, unknown to my mother, but there is no more truth in his base insinuations than there is in your own surmises, respecting your friend and myself. There is no shadow of love between us; no word of love has ever passed our lips. For this man, my knowledge of him has solely reference to my elder brother, of whose early life you may, perhaps, have heard. Mr. Hurst knows all that has ever passed between us, and that at the expense of much misery to myself, I have kept secret from my family that which it would kill my mother to become acquainted with; but I cannot bear to live under the stigma he has dared to throw on me. I will write to Mr. Hurst, and ask him to send you a narrative of the events it would be painful and humiliating to me to relate personally to you."

I will not repeat the words with which he answered this assurance of my indifference to

his friend, of the passionate appeals he made to me to pardon his unjust suspicions; the peculiar circumstances attending our interview, had broken down all conventional restraint, and I did not attempt to conceal the feelings of my heart. I will not write the nonsense Cuthbert uttered as we walked home that night. But I did not think it nonsense then, nor does any woman regard it such as she listens to words of passionate love from the man who possesses her heart.

Our happiness was not diminished by knowing it must be years before he could claim me as a wife; and when that day arrived, I was not to be divided from my mother; my home was to be her's likewise, or I should live and die Nelly Travers.

This beloved parent was made acquainted with the engagement I had formed as soon as I reached home, and while she reminded me laughingly of Benedict, congratulated me affectionately on having won the affections of such a man as Cuthbert Headley; that night I would not sleep till I had told Maude that I hoped some day to call her by a dearer name than that of friend.

## CHAPTER X.

I HAD heard from Cuthbert that Jasper Coxe was the man who had resided for several months past at the Down Farm as Count d'Lanskoi, and I wondered that I had not discovered the identity both of the man and woman from the descriptions I had frequently received of those strangers.

To my great relief, I learnt that the "Count" had quitted the farm on the plea of sudden business the day after my rencontre with him. I felt that he dared not face Cuthbert again, and once more I indulged the hope I might never behold either him or his vile confederate more.

Cuthbert had acquainted farmer Hobbes with the character of the wretch he had har-

boured for so long a time under his roof, and he had given his wife peremptory commands never to admit them as residents again. Frightened at the stern manner in which her husband addressed her, and tired of her long estrangement from him, she promised to obey him, and not suffer them to remain when they returned for the quantity of property which it appeared they had placed in her house.

About a week after the events recorded in the last chapter, my mother was informed late one evening that the young fisherman, Jos Sim pson, wished to speak with her. Supposing he had brought a message from his mother relative to some work she had sent her a few days previously, she asked me to see the young man, and send back whatever instructions she might require respecting it.

Rather astonished that Mrs. Simpson should have sent at such an hour, I went into the hall to speak to her son. I found him in a state of great agitation, and believing it must be occasioned by sudden illness or accident to some member of his

family, I inquired in what way I could assist him.

It was for assistance he had come, though not for any part of his family.

He had a strange and melancholy tale to relate. He had that day been some hours at sea, in a small boat, for the purpose of hooking whitings, and had been tolerably successful in his endeavours. It was late in the evening when he returned, and as it was very cold, and he had been several hours without food, he, with the help of his brother Tom, carried the fish home, intending to return after his supper for the various articles he had left in the boat.

It was past ten before he returned to the beach, and, to his surprize and horror, when he entered his boat, he perceived by the light of the lanthorn he carried, the body of a man, apparently dead, stretched at the bottom. At first, he stated, he thought it must be one of the fishers on the beach, who, returning from the village ale-house not very sober, had entered the boat for the purpose of sleeping off the effects of their potations; but a second

look convinced him of his mistake. It was apparently the corpse of an utter stranger, and not a sleeping comrade on which he gazed.

Horrified at the dreadful sight, he rushed back to his mother's cottage, and alarmed her with an account of what he had witnessed.

What were they to do? the children were all in bed, and the inhabitants of the neighbouring cottages long since at rest. If they roused them for the purpose of acquainting them with such an awful occurrence, what suspicions might they not entertain respecting the dead man's being discovered at that hour of the night in their boat?

At last, the mother suggested that after all the stranger might not be dead, that probably it was some poor tired wayfarer who, having no place of refuge for the night, had preferred the bottom of the boat to the damp sands, and that if they suffered him to remain till the morning exposed to the cold, he might in reality become the corpse he now appeared.

Jos acknowledged he had refused to admit this solution of the dreadful mystery, but,

urged by his mother, who benevolently hoped she might render a service to some poor vagrant, he consented to accompany her to the boat, where they found the stranger in exactly the same position in which the young man had first beheld him. The mother, stooping down and placing her hand on his heart, discovered, to her joy, that he was not, as Jos had supposed, dead. Assured of this, he readily agreed to assist her in supporting the unfortunate man to their cottage, where, placed in her bed and warmth applied to his half-frozen limbs, he gradually awakened from the death-like stupor in which they had discovered him. So long as the widow and her son were actively engaged in their work of mercy, they did not think of their inability to supply the stranger with the restoratives his situation demanded; but once satisfied he lived, Jos was despatched by his mother to beg that assistance might be afforded him.

This was readily promised, as soon as I had communicated the story to my mother and Mrs. Headley, and while they were em-

ployed in collecting together the various articles they considered would conduce to the comfort of the poor wanderer, I plied Jos with innumerable questions relative to the appearance of the stranger. Was he young? Was he well dressed? Had he the look of a traveller, or of one who had seen better days?

To all these questions the young fisherman returned answers in his own fashion.

"He warn't to say young like, nor he warn't old—leastways he didn't look so. As to his dress, it was middling good, and did not look as if it had belonged to a working man; and his hands were as white as a lady's."

When the large basket, containing food, stimulants, and clothing, was given to Jos, Cuthbert and Louis declared their intention of accompanying him back to the cottage.

"It may be necessary," said the former, "to summon Mr. Wilkins to the stranger's assistance; besides, there may be circumstances which render it prudent some one besides the widow and her son should behold him while actually living. It was pos-

sible, without such a nesessary precaution, their active benevolence might be the means of raising suspicion against them should the stranger expire before the morning."

The night was far advanced before they returned, but every one was too anxious to hear what tidings they brought of the stranger to retire to rest. The account which they gave excited still more highly our compassion and curiosity respecting him.

They described him as a man of apparently thirty years of age, but so haggard and emaciated, so wan and wretched in appearance, that he might possibly be considerably older; but it was the opinion of Mr. Wilkins, who had seen him, that he had not reached thirty years.

Though worn and shabby, his dress was of good materials, and fashionably made, and his appearance altogether indicated that his position in life had once been respectable.

"Poor fellow," said Louis, "he has, I think gone through some severe trials, and I should judge they had affected his mind, for

anything like the wild, piteous look he cast on Cuthbert and myself as we approached his bed, I never witnessed. It was a look at once of fear and supplication, but which changed to one of serenity when he discovered he had no cause to dread us. He has evidently been harshly used from some persons from whom he has escaped; for his agony at the slightest noise which falls on his ear is distressing to behold. It is as if he imagined some one would appear whom he had reason to dread. In answer to a question I put, as to whether he had spoken of any one who could be sent for, I learned that the poor creature did not appear to possess the power of speech; but whether this inability proceeded from natural infirmity, or severe pressure on the nervous system, Mr. Wilkins had not been able that night to discover."

Early in the morning Jos arrived to give us intelligence of the manner in which the stranger had passed the night. According to his statement no change had taken place; he remained motionless, and apparently insen-

sible to all that passed around him, unless a footstep outside the house aroused his attention, when he would start up, and with a cry like a frightened animal, clutch convulsively at those who were near, and fix his eyes on them with a wild, imploring look, as if entreating their protection. Soothed by assurances that no one should molest him, he would again fall back on the pillow, and relapse into the same death-like torpor from which his terror had awakened him.

In the course of the day, Mr. Wilkins called, and had a long conversation with the gentlemen respecting the measures which should be adopted respecting his poor patient. That he had escaped from some place of confinement could hardly be doubted; but the most puzzling part of the affair was, that there was no asylum for the reception of lunatics within several miles, while the thin slippers he had on when discovered, afforded convincing evidence that he could have walked but a short distance.

"Something must be done," said the surgeon, "to discover his friends or connexions;

he cannot long remain in the widow's cottage. She is not equal to the task of attending on him, even if you benevolently supply his wants. We must advertise, I suppose, and state all the circumstances attending Jos's discovery, and then if we receive no tidings concerning him, he must be removed to the union."

There was a general outcry against this very practical mode of disposing of the outcast, and my mother's indignation was especially excited by it.

"It is certain, you say, Mr. Wilkins, that this poor creature exhibits the extremity of terror wherever the sound of a passing footstep falls on his ear. Is not that a proof that he has reason to dread being discovered by the persons from whom he has fled, and would not an advertisement be the very means of consigning him to those who must have grossly misused the power they possessed over him, and whose cruelty has most likely occasioned his present miserable condition. Wait, in the name of humanity, till he is able

to tell who and what he fears. I will undertake to provide kind and efficient nurses."

Mr. Wilkins, who was, in reality, a humane man, although his duty as parish surgeon sometimes compelled him to act contrary to his own inclinations readily agreed to allow this, when relieved from all responsibility to the guardians by the promise that the expenses attending the stranger's illness would be defrayed by the party at Baymouth House, and acknowledged he was heartily glad he had not to deliver up the poor sheep to the wolf from whom he had escaped.

By the advice of Mr. Wilkins, no one was admitted into the sick chamber of the stranger but Mrs. Simpson and her family, to whom he had become accustomed, and the person employed to assist in nursing him, but we received daily bulletins concerning him. He had in the course of a week recovered in a slight degree from the extreme weakness under which he laboured, when discovered in the boat, and the surgeon considered he had no particular physical malady; but he was still speechless, and still continued to manifest

the terror he had shown from the first, whenever a strange or unexpected noise met his ear.

One day I went with my mother to the cottage, for the purpose of inquiring concerning the patient, and ascertaining he had all his situation required.

We found, on asking for the nurse, that she had taken the advantage of Polly Simpson's having a holiday to spend with her mother, to revisit her own home, which was in an adjoining village. My mother, who had some particular directions to give Mrs. Simpson, requested the girl, who had never yet been in the stranger's room, to take her mother's place for a few minutes. We heard her softly ascend the stairs and open the door of the sick chamber. The next instant we were paralyzed with horror—shriek after shriek of the most appalling description followed each other without the intervention of a second, while a noise as if of a great weight falling, shook the walls of the cottage.

Pale with terror, I clung to my mother's dress to prevent her leaving me. "Let me

go, Nelly, let me go, my child!" exclaimed she; "the unhappy maniac may murder the poor woman if we do not go to her assistance."

Ashamed of my selfish weakness, I released her, and followed her up the stairs; but before I could enter the room from which the screams had issued, another and more terrible one rang through the house, and as I reached the door, I saw my mother, as if smitten by a thunderbolt, fall to the ground. If terror could have killed, I never should have survived that moment. There lay my mother as if dead, while leaning over her, gibbering like an idiot, was my brother Henry—the very Henry, from whom a few weeks ago had we received a letter, dated from Montreal. The Henry we imagined happy, respected, and prosperous, thousands of miles distant! I tried to believe it was impossible, that it was some horrible resemblance to my brother which deceived me. That poor, emaciated wretch, bereft of reason, of the power of speech, who for more than a week past had been the unknown recipient of my

mother's benevolence, could not be the beloved son, the trusted friend, the partner of wealthy and honourable men!

Alas, alas! there was no room for doubt. As I advanced to the spot where my mother had fallen, the unhappy creature put up his hand as if in dread of my approach, and I recognised the distorted thumb which had given such a marked peculiarity to my unhappy brother's writing, and which ought to have convinced me he had written the letter I had received from the hands of Jasper Coxe.

With difficulty I placed my mother on the bed from which her wretched son had apparently flung himself in terror at the entrance of a stranger; Mrs. Simpson, with scared looks and trembling hands, assisted me to do so, having first despatched her daughter for Mr. Wilkins. Before he arrived, I had succeeded in restoring my unhappy mother to consciousness. As soon as she was capable of rising from the bed, she insisted that her son should be replaced on it, and then, patient and resigned, seated herself

by his side: he appeared gratified by her presence, though it was evident he did not recognise her, and holding her hand in his, fell into a profound slumber. When Mr. Wilkins arrived, she told him in a calm voice of her relationship to the unknown outcast, and her determination never to leave him.

"I cannot explain to you," she said, sadly, "why he is here, and thus. I do not know, I cannot form the faintest surmise on the subject; but whatever cause has brought him to this terrible condition, it is not a mother's heart which can condemn him."

In compliance with her wishes, I quitted the cottage with the surgeon, for the purpose of sending Martha to her assistance, and to communicate the terrible discovery to our friends. I could never recollect in what terms I related my sad tale, nor the manner in which it was received. I was taken almost immediately by Maude to my room, where for three days and nights she watched over me with a sister's love.

I had experienced heavy sorrow before, but I had not, as I now had, the miserable

belief that it was in a great measure occasioned by my own fault.

Had I confided, as I ought to have done, all that I knew respecting Henry to my mother, might not this awful calamity have been averted? To save her present pain, I had conferred on her a life-long misery. Had she known of the letter I received in London, she would have taken the necessary steps to have discovered the truth, and most probably have rescued my brother from the power of his oppressors.

One thing was clear now to my comprehension, Henry must have left Canada, and returned to England almost as soon as he had landed there, and again become entangled with his former associates. The letter I had so easily taught myself to believe was a forgery must have been written at their dictation; and those we had received through the medium of Mr. Heath, must have been part of the deep-laid plot to defraud my mother of the large sums she had advanced for the benefit of her repentant son.

It was all so perceptible to me now, that

I could only wonder at my former blindness. Still the scheme had been so skilfully concocted—the letters, which must have been written by their victim, while confined in some secret den, were dictated with such consummate knowledge of his character, and of the manner in which he was accustomed to appeal to his mother's feelings—that I might be forgiven for falling into the snare which was spread for our feet.

As soon as I was able to rise from the bed to which the suddenness of the shock, and my own remorse, had confined me, I insisted on joining my mother, who had never quitted the side of my unhappy brother. I found her quiet and resigned, and so entirely occupied by her sad duties, that I did not think she had observed my absence, although she welcomed me with affection, and willingly consented to my remaining with her.

I fancied I perceived a slight improvement in Henry since I had first beheld him; his debility was not quite so great, and he swallowed, without repugnance, the nourishment offered him. And Mr. Wilkins gave my

mother the hope that in a few weeks she might be able to remove him to Brookfields.

As for his intellect, it was as dormant as the night on which he had been discovered by the young fisherman. He had not uttered a word or betrayed any sign of intelligence, excepting that his eyes followed his mother whenever she moved, and that he showed symptoms of uneasiness when she was absent from him.

I was very thankful that she quitted him for the purpose of taking necessary repose, as I had feared she would have acted as she had done during my father's illness, and refuse to leave him a moment.

"You look surprised, Nelly," she said, with a faint attempt at a smile, as she kissed the pale, altered face of her son, before she retired to another room for the night. "This is not an illness of a few days' duration, like your father's. It will last, probably, beyond my lifetime, and I must husband my strength that I may prove equal to the discharge of my duty."

I used at this time frequently to think of

the words of the proverb, "Cast thy bread on the waters, and it shall return to thee after many days."

The devotion shown by the poor widow and her family to my mother in this period of her affliction was touching to witness. They appeared to consider it a privilege to place themselves and their scanty resources at her disposal, and never appeared so happy as in sacrificing their own comfort and employing themselves in her service.

As soon as Esther was informed of our trouble, she had left her husband and come with Mr. Lancester to our assistance. Her society was a great solace to my mother, and the knowledge that I had been the author to some extent of this wretchedness, enabled me to bear, without showing how much it wounded me, that my sister's sympathy was valued more than my own. I deserved punishment for my past selfishness, and I strove to bear it patiently.

Yes; I now acknowledged to myself that I had acted throughout this sad business purely in a spirit of selfishness. The pain I should

experience from seeing my mother's unhappiness had induced me to conceal from her, as I had done, the knowledge of Henry's share in the robbery of the plate, and all the after events were produced by that secresy.

Mr. Lancester had, with the aid of Cuthbert, succeeded in unravelling the mystery of Henry's appearance in Baymouth. He had escaped from the Down Farm, where, unknown to its master, he had been confined a prisoner for nearly twelve months.

The horrible woman, whose beauty had enslaved him, had taken advantage of the infatuation of Mrs. Hobbes, to persuade her into giving an asylum to one whom she represented as the insane brother of her husband, whom, from family motives, it was necessary should be kept in strict confinement.

With many tears and entreaties for pardon, the humbled mistress of the farm confessed the cruel treatment which had been frequently bestowed on him by his brutal jailors.

According to her statement, when he first arrived at the farm—which was one night at a late hour—he was perfectly able to con-

verse, and remonstrated vehemently against the rigid confinement in which he was kept.

Sometimes, by threats of punishment, they had compelled him to write at their dictation; but the last time they succeeded in doing so, he solemnly vowed that nothing should induce him to obey them again.

This was but a few weeks ago; and when they found that threats and blows were alike unable to make him comply with their demands, they had deprived him of food, beyond the scantiest means of existence, and forced him to swallow what Mrs. Hobbes denominated "sleeping stuff"—to prevent the cries which the sharp pangs of hunger frequently extorted, from being heard by the inmates of the farm. And she acknowledged that when Jasper absconded, she had left him unguarded in the hope he would free her from all responsibility by making his escape.

Anxious to atone for her past conduct, by giving every facility in her power to enable the friends of the unhappy man to gather all the particulars respecting the manner in which he was treated, she one day brought me a

packet of papers she had discovered concealed beneath the mattress on which he slept. They were filled with writing in my brother's hand. I had considerable difficulty in arranging them in the order in which they appeared to have been written; and, as I read their contents, my eyes were frequently so blinded by my tears that I was compelled, for a time, to give up my attempt to decipher them.

He must have commenced them shortly after his arrival at the farm, for the earlier sheets made no mention of ill treatment beyond his enforced confinement.

It appeared as if he had endeavoured to keep a diary of the few events which occurred in his monotonous existence. He frequently alluded to visits from Rachel, and sometimes recorded little kindnesses he received from her:

"Rachel has been here, and kinder than for a long time past. I asked her how long she intended me to remain a prisoner, and she answered as long as it was necessary for my own safety. It was yet uncertain

whether the man I had struck in a fit of mad jealousy would recover. I cannot understand how the blow I dealt with only my closed hand could have occasioned such fatal consequences, and that after such a lapse of time he that received it should continue in such imminent danger."

In another part, written, apparently, some time after, he deplored he had ever listened to Rachel's arguments, and returned with her to England.

From what I could gather from detached portions of this sad record of my unhappy brother's weakness, she had taken a passage in the same vessel with himself, although he was ignorant of her presence till two days after he had embarked in it.

During the voyage she had, by her protestations of affection, obtained his consent to leave Canada, and return with her to England as soon as possible after their arrival at the former place; and he hinted obscurely at some concession she had made to induce him to do so.

Once there was an allusion to the violence

of her temper, and the wounds she had inflicted on him the night he was carried to his father's door in a senseless condition.

He had resented an attempt of Jasper Coxe—whom he evidently had always considered as her brother—to rob, at some game of chance, a stranger he had enticed to their home; and on his warning him to be on his guard, had received from the hands of the infuriated woman the injuries which occasioned the long and dreadful illness I remembered so well.

It seemed that his acquaintance with her must have commenced when he was a mere boy. Sometimes he lost sight of her for years together; but whenever she chose to recall him, his fatal passion for her rendered him again her dupe and slave; and to supply her extravagancies, he hesitated at nothing which gave him the means of gratifying them.

The last lines he had penned were blotted with tears, and the hand was evidently very feeble which had traced them:

"God have mercy on me and hearken to my prayers for pardon! I fear my life will

not be long spared, and I have no wish to live, but that I might once more see my mother and obtain her forgiveness. One thing I have resolved—not all their threats, not all the miseries they daily inflict on me, shall force me to write another of those lying letters.

* * * *

"I wonder if Nelly ever suspected the truth concerning them. Poor Nelly! what a brave girl she was that night! and she never told my mother of what would have made her hate me for ever.

"Oh, God! give me strength to resist further temptation to evil. May my present sufferings blot out some of my past iniquities in Thy sight! How often do the words my father once addressed to me, rush into my memory. They were uttered in loving admonition when he left me, as he thought, in security at Liverpool: 'My boy, if you again transgress, be sure your sin will find you out!'"

These were the last intelligible words he had ever written, although several sheets

were scrawled over, as if he had tried to trace the words his hand had not strength to form distinctly, and the little I could comprehend was evidently the wanderings of a diseased mind.

My mother never betrayed the slightest wish to be informed of the circumstances connected with Henry's return to England. She never mentioned the letters received from Liverpool, or her visit to the supposed agent of her son, whom I doubted not was Jasper Coxe in disguise.

"Let the past be a blank in our memories," she had said to Gerald, when he declared his intention of bringing to justice those who had practised such a series of infamous frauds on herself, and reduced my brother to such a miserable condition. "I do not wish to be told anything of my son's former companions. It was in his name they obtained the money; I will not be the means of having it brought before the world, mingled with theirs."

Even now my mother remained in ignorance of Henry's participation in the robbery at her house. We kept from her still all that

was considered likely to aggravate her distress, and at her earnest request, made no attempts to punish those who had inflicted on her such terrible injuries.

It was nearly three months before Henry could be removed to Brookfields, and it was with pain I then parted from the friends whose sympathy had lightened, as far as it could be lightened, the wretchedness in which those three months had been passed.

I had endeavoured to persuade Cuthbert to consider our brief engagement as cancelled by the events which had immediately followed it. I told him that henceforward my whole time and duty must belong to my mother, and that should my unhappy brother survive her, I should devote my life to the task of supplying her place towards him. But Cuthbert would not consent to receive back his freedom; he would persist in looking hopefully to the future. Henry's intellect might again become clear; besides, he reminded me that our engagement was to last for an indefinite period, and that till he was in a condition to claim its fulfilment, I had no right

to speak of dissolving it ; I had no right to talk of difficulties till he had surmounted those which existed when I had pledged myself to be his.

" I do not recognise any difficulties, Nelly, but those time will remove. I am willing to serve, like Jacob, a double apprenticeship for my Rachel."

The sound of that name struck a cold thrill to my heart, and it seemed ominous of evil that it should be the last word uttered by Cuthbert as we parted.

## CHAPTER XI.

Our life at Brookfields passed with little variety. Occasionally we received visits from Esther and her husband; but she was now a mother, and her new duties weakened, to some extent, the interest she had hitherto retained in what she called her "home ties." My greatest pleasure consisted in my correspondence with Maude, and in the receipt of an occasional letter from Cuthbert, who insisted on his right to write to me as a friend; and although my reason told me it was wrong to encourage my affection for him, yet I was too barren of happiness to wilfully reject the little which fell to my lot.

One of the most disastrous circumstances relative to our late misfortune, was that it

blighted the hopes of my youngest brother. It was no longer possible for my mother to defray his expenses at college. Not only was her income seriously diminished by the loss of the money obtained from her in such a base manner, but Henry's unhappy situation entailed considerable additional expense in our household. This disappointment was a very bitter one to Edmund, and he lamented that he had not been educated at a public school in England, where he would have had the opportunity of gaining an exhibition, which might have defrayed a considerable portion of his expenses while at the University.

He found it very difficult now to determine as to his future career. Gerald and Walter earnestly advised him to choose their own profession, where the former would be able to assist him; but Edmund had an invincible repugnance to doing so, and I did not urge him to accept the offer, for I knew he did not possess the nerve requisite to succeed in a profession which, above all others, demanded both firmness and promptitude, qualities in which he was deficient.

As he was yet too young to render a few months' delay of importance, he was to continue as a pupil at the Parsonage till he had decided on his future pursuits.

Before the summer had passed, Henry was sufficiently restored to health to walk without assistance, but he never could be persuaded to leave the house unaccompanied by his mother, whom he regarded with the same kind of instinctive attachment which a dog bestows on his master. He was obedient to her every wish, and would keep up a kind of plaintive moaning when she was absent from him. He was amused with the most childish employments, and would sit quiet for hours while she with her scissors cut out the figures of dogs, horses, and other animals, from sheets of coloured paper.

But his favourite toys were little leaden soldiers, which he would place in various positions. Sometimes a look would steal over his face as if he was trying to recollect the way in which he should form the ranks and squares into which he wished to arrange his miniature troops, and then, when unable

to place them as he wished, he would, with a sudden outburst of passion, sweep them to the floor, from which his poor mother would raise them, and as she re-arranged them on the table, appeal to me whether it was not a hopeful sign that anything had power to interest him sufficiently to excite his temper.

The physicians who had been consulted had not quite deprived her of the hope that he might eventually recover in some degree from his present state of imbecility, but that such an event would most probably be occasioned by a sudden shock, connected with the circumstances which had reduced him to it; but they had likewise imparted to Gerald —what I had entreated him to conceal from my mother—that such a shock was likely to prove fatal to his physical powers; and that if his reason was restored, it would, in all human probability, be at the expense of his life.

With this knowledge, every hopeful expression she uttered sent a pang to my heart, for wretched as was his present state of existence, she clung to him as the dearest object in life. The more deplorable his state,

the greater amount of love was lavished on him by his mother.

I have learned since to know this feeling was not peculiar to herself, but that in every family the child smitten with infirmity, no matter of how terrible a nature, is the object of love beyond all others to a mother. And blessed be God that He has implanted such feelings in the maternal heart. It is the one sweet drop in the cup of bitterness, from which the sufferer must drink through life.

One event was to brighten the darkness of the present year, the year which had opened for me without a cloud. From Maude's letters, I was soon enabled to perceive that the misunderstanding between her and Louis was clearing away.

He was to have quitted Baymouth with Cuthbert, shortly after ourselves, but owing to an accident to his foot, was compelled to see his friend depart without him. Thrown, by this circumstance, much into Maude's society, it was not surprising that the love I was convinced he felt for her should soon become visible; but I was at some loss to understand

how she had contrived to keep in him ignorance of her own sentiments. The letter in which she informed me she had consented to accept him, likewise told me he believed she had done so purely out of compassion.

"It is the only solace to my wounded self-esteem," she wrote, "that he should labour under such an impression. I would have sacrificed my own happiness, and perhaps his, rather than have sunk in his opinion by letting him suspect my contemptible weakness; and of which, remember, Nelly, no one is cognisant but yourself; and after all, my dear, it was the merest chance the man ever cared a straw for me. He had been accustomed to dawdle after you till he considered female society essential to his happiness, and when he was silly enough to run a black thorn into his foot, and could not move for some weeks in consequence, from the sofa, mamma took compassion on him, and insisted he should spend the greater part of his time in our rooms, and thus he became used to have me about him, and by the time his foot was well, he fancied his heart was wounded;

and, as I have told you, I listened to him in sheer compassion. And now, whenever I indulge him by conversing with him, his sole topics are lamentations over what he calls my insensibility to his love, and the fear that I shall never be able to bestow on him more than a sister's affection."

"How happy some o'er other some can be,"

thought I, as I folded up this letter.

For a short space the sunshine of love and hope visited my heart, but it remained there only long enough to make me feel how precious it was to me.

May Maude's last her whole life, and be as warm and bright at the conclusion as at the beginning!

During this sad time I derived great comfort from my occasional intercourse with Mrs. Locksley, who, possessing few acquaintances, and no friends, led a sad and solitary existence at the farm.

The poor woman always appeared to act as if the spirit of her departed parent must

be hovering among the scenes of his earthly pilgrimage. She would not suffer the position of an article in the house to be altered; his chair still stood in its accustomed corner in the wide chimney, with the small round table placed by its side; and as she moved about the house, engaged in her accustomed duties, I have observed her suddenly stop, with a startled look, and listen, as if his voice summoned her as formerly to his assistance.

I used to wonder that the morbid feeling she displayed regarding his peculiarities respecting the disposition of his household treasures, did not prevent her from freely spending his equally valued wealth; but of this she was as liberal as if he had himself loved to bestow it on the poor and needy. Not a person in the village or its neighbourhood who required help, but discovered their necessities, would be relieved by the benevolent mistress of Sandhill Farm, who, without grudge or stint, fed the hungry, clothed the naked, visited the sick, prayed by the dying, and soothed the anguish of the bereaved.

She was as bountiful of her own labour as she was of her wealth, and would be absent from home days and nights together. Heedless of fatigue, and indifferent to the risk she encountered of infection, she would watch by the beds of the fever-stricken, in some wretched dwelling, and when, by her care and unlimited bounty, they were enabled to rise from what, but for her, must have proved the bed of death, she returned to her home, humbly grateful to God, who had given her the means of aiding the unfortunate.

She had been absent some days on one of these missions of mercy, and when I heard she had returned home, I went to see her, and hear the particulars relative to her poor patients.

I never was in the habit of knocking for admission, in my visits to the farm, but if I did not find its mistress in the outer room, proceeded at once to the kitchen. On this occasion I was startled at hearing heavy sobs from some person within it; listening, with my hand on the fastening of the door, I hesitated, for a short time, to enter, but as

these sounds of affliction were uninterrupted by the voice of any second person, I concluded the poor woman was suffering from the fatigue she had experienced during her recent absence from home, and glad that I had arrived just at the moment when my presence might prove serviceable, I entered the room so silently, that at first I was not perceived by its inmates.

It was indeed Mrs. Locksley whose sobs I had heard outside the door, but I was wrong in supposing she was alone. Sitting in the old farmer's chair, I saw the woman whom I had known only by the name of Rachel, but the moment I beheld her there, I knew, and only wondered I had not previously made the discovery, that she was the wicked daughter of that good and righteous woman —not returned sick and in poverty, as her mother's heart had pictured, but evidently in full health and in prosperity, if I might judge by her expensive and even elegant attire.

She sat with her eyes fixed insolently on her weeping mother, a smile of contempt on her lip, as she witnessed her agony of grief.

I stood irresolute. Ought I to intrude on this interview between the long-separated mother and daughter? Might not my presence aggravate the sorrow of the one, the insolence of the other?

Short time was given me to decide whether I should advance or retire. A noise in the outer room caused the daughter to turn her head towards the door, and, as she saw me, pale and trembling, standing by it, she rose hastily from the chair.

Mrs. Locksley, startled by her sudden movement, raised her bowed head from her hands, and stretching them towards me, hurriedly implored me to be gone.

"Go from beneath this polluted roof!" she exclaimed, and as she spoke she advanced to the place where I was standing. "The daughter, for whose return I have prayed to God day and night, is here, but as a punishment and not a blessing is she sent. Instead of penitence, she brings vice—instead of affection, insolence and ingratitude! Oh! father!—father!" cried the excited woman, "if your spirit—as I believe it does—beholds

us now, judge if I am not right to refuse that the wealth you left me should be squandered in profligacy by this wretched girl! Not for my own sake do I apply that which I hold only as your steward, and I have hitherto striven, through God's grace, to place it where it shall return precious interest!"

I put my arms round the poor miserable mother, and tried to lead her back to her seat, but she disengaged herself from me, and pointed, with an earnest, imploring look to the door; but I had a task to perform, and I nerved myself to discharge it.

I had constantly carried, in a small pocket-book, the paper the farmer had entrusted me to deliver to his grandchild, should I ever be so unfortunate as to encounter her, and Mrs. Locksley's passionate appeal to the spirit of her father had recalled to my recollection the solemn promise I had made to the dying man.

Hannah, who had remained by the chair from which she had risen on my entrance, now came towards me, and seizing me by the arm, drew me into the centre of the room.

"So!" she cried, in a tone of bitter mockery, "this is the pure, innocent dove, whose feathers would be soiled by coming in contact with such a foul bird as I am? Look at her, I say!—look at her!" she continued, as I vainly struggled to free myself from her hold. "Look at the pretty, dainty creature, who you, poor soul, think must blush at my guilty presence. Ask her where the man is she has seduced from me!—ask her how many times she has met him alone at night, unknown to her mother! Why, I tell you she has carried from me him you would not allow to contaminate your father's honest roof, as you call it! Ask her, I say!—let her own mouth convince you she is as vile a creature as you call me!"

I was no longer to be intimidated by this woman—I could now defy her malice—and turning to Mrs. Locksley, I said, "It is true what your daughter asserts, relative to my meeting the man to whom she alludes, but she compelled me, by threats of injuring those I dearly loved, to do so. She was always with him when I was forced to see him, and

received the money extorted from my fears. You know the state of my unhappy brother—it is your daughter who has reduced him to it." Then extending towards her the paper I had taken from my pocket-book, I said, "I promised your dying grandfather to give you this, should I unfortunately ever meet you."

As she snatched it from my hand, I turned to Mrs. Locksley, and entreated her forgiveness for taking charge of the paper without her knowledge, and added, that if, as I supposed, it deprived her of her rightful inheritance, my mother, I was sure, would gladly provide her a home in our family.

Hannah had torn open the packet the instant she had it in her hands, and by this time had mastered its contents. She now turned to her mother, with sparkling eyes and triumphant look.

"So, then, the truth is out at last! I am the owner of this 'honest roof,' and my first act as its mistress shall be to command Miss Nelly Travers to quit it! As for you, mother, I shall demand a strict account of the stew-

ardship you talked about just now. What my grandfather left me, that I'll have; but you are at liberty to remain here while I keep the house, and I dare say that won't be long."

"Come with me," whispered I, to the dismayed, broken-hearted woman. "Come with me; let me repair, as far as I can, the injury I have inflicted on you."

"No, no!—God bless you for your kind offer, but I cannot consent willingly to leave this house so long as I am permitted to remain in it. I promised him I never would, and I will not."

"I hope grandfather is capable of appreciating your devotion," sneered her daughter; "but as I conclude your friend made no such promise, I beg to remind her that her presence is disagreeable to me, and if she persists in remaining, I shall consider it a challenge to nform her mother of many things she would be sorry she should become acquainted with."

I had no motive now for concealment, and I therefore answered this threat by saying, calmly, she could divulge nothing my friends

were ignorant of, and that for her own sake she would do well not to molest me, or any member of my family.

"Indeed!" she answered, with a sneer; "you may find that your family consists of more members than you are now aware of, and who may claim relationship with you some day quite unexpectedly; but, as I have told you before, I do not wish you to remain. If you will not leave my house directly, I will remove you by force."

Without reply to this insolence, I took an affectionate farewell of the unhappy mother, and hurried from the place.

My brain was in a whirl as I walked towards home. I did not know whether to reveal to my friends the fact of this woman's presence, or to withhold from their knowledge that the evil genius of my unfortunate brother was again near him.

It was too late in the day for me to see Mr. Hurst, and be guided by his advice; and as I concluded it was impossible Hannah would dare in any way to annoy us, I deter-

mined to keep secret for the present all that I had that day discovered.

When I returned home, I found my mother hopelessly endeavouring to amuse Henry, who, more excited and restless than usual, did not take his customary interest in the toys which were strewn in all directions about the room. His mother, who looked both pained and fatigued by her useless exertions, consented after a time to leave him in my charge for an hour or two, and shortly after she had quitted the room, to my great satisfaction, he fell asleep.

As I watched by his side, my thoughts naturally reverted to the scene I had witnessed at the Farm that afternoon, and its connection with himself. Poor fellow! I thought, as I gazed on his pale face, she can never more harm you; the power she once possessed can never again be exerted for your injury. I may remember she is near, without dreading she can ever have the ability of harming you, and by that means inflict pain on those who love you.

Then my pity was aroused for the poor

mother, compelled to subsist on the charity of her wicked daughter, and I reproached myself for the part I had taken in depriving her of her birthright; but surely, thought I, as vague ideas of law reports recurred to my memory, surely, the paper I have given to Hannah cannot invalidate the will made at a later period, by which the farmer left his property to his daughter; I have always heard it is the last will which is recognised as the legal one. Delighted that I had discovered a loophole through which Mrs. Locksley might continue in possession of her late father's property, I determined to see Mr. Hurst early in the morning, and communicating to him all the particulars of the transaction, urge him to interest Mr. Sanders to interfere for the benefit of the rightful owner of Sandhill Farm.

I felt happier when relieved from the dread of having caused a great act of injustice, and when Henry, who had awakened much more composed, was seated again by the side of his patient and anxious mother, occupied with

the toys he had previously neglected, I was able to converse cheerfully with my brother Edmund, who had walked from the Vicarage to spend the evening with us.

After tea, he insisted on taking his mother's office for some time, and Henry endeavoured, by an uncouth kind of chuckle, to express his delight at the means employed to entertain him.

Suddenly, he uttered a terrific scream, and, starting to his feet, pointed with outstretched arms to the door, where, in bold defiance, stood Hannah Locksley.

My mother, at the sound of Henry's cry of alarm, had rushed to his side, and thrown her arms around him. But he seemed unconscious of her touch; his eyes were fixed on the face of his enemy, whom, it was evident, he recognised, while his lips moved as if he endeavoured to address her.

Edmund was the first to speak; he had in a moment divined who it was he beheld.

"What is the meaning of this intrusion," he demanded, in a stern voice; "how dare

you insult my mother and sister with your presence? how dare you have the hardihood to look on the wreck you have made of this lost, unhappy man? Leave the house this instant; or you shall be punished as you merit for the misery you have inflicted on us all in the person of this your miserable victim."

"I am come," answered she, calmly, "to release you of what must be a grievous charge. I did not attempt to do so while I had no proper place in which to receive him; now I am the owner of Sandhill Farm, I claim the charge of my husband."

"Your husband?" said my mother, fiercely, as she still clung to her son. "Oh! Henry! oh! my son—that you could yourself disprove this base lie!"

The poor fellow, as his mother thus passionately appealed to him, looked at her as he had never done since the night he had been removed from the boat; there was a mournful intelligence in his face which told us as plainly as words, could he have spoken,

that he had understood the woman's assertions, and acknowledged their truth.

That look seemed as if it had pierced the heart of his unhappy mother, for, with a groan of anguish, she removed her arms from his neck, and steadied herself against the table as if to support herself from falling. Edmund rushed to her assistance, and whispered his entreaties that she would allow him to take her from the room. But she shook her head, and pointed to Henry as if asking that he only might be thought of.

He had never moved since the moment he had risen from his chair when he discovered the presence of Hannah in the doorway; he still stood with his arm outstretched, as if motioning her to leave the room; but no sound escaped his lips, though they continually moved as if he uttered words, which were inaudible to all but himself.

My courage returned as my indignation mastered my first feelings of dismay and surprize.

"What proof have you," I demanded, "of the truth of what you have just uttered? You

do not suppose we shall believe you without other evidence than your own words?"

"Perhaps you will believe this," she replied, and impudently advancing to where I stood, with an insolent smile, put a small paper into my hand.

I gave it to Edmund, and, after he had read it, he returned it to me with a look of despair. It was the certificate of a marriage solemnized just about the time my brother had returned from Canada, and purported to be between Henry Travers and Hannah Rachel Locksley.

"Are you satisfied, my dear brother and sister?" said the impertinent creature; "I told you, Nelly darling, that you had more relations than you knew of. You look surprized," she added, to Edmund, "at my intimate knowledge of Miss Nelly. Did not the sly girl tell you we had met this afternoon, at my house? Oh! Nelly, Nelly, you are too fond of mystery; I must act an elder sister's part in looking after you."

Then turning to Henry, she said, as she attempted to embrace him, "Won't you

come with your wife, love? You have not forgotten me, I am sure!"

Her touch had the power of calling the dead to life—to restore, for a time, the reason which we thought was for ever lost, and the voice we never expected to hear again.

Slowly and hesitatingly the words fell from his white lips, but they were expressed coherently and uttered calmly—

"I will never speak to you again—I will never look on you more! Mother, take me away!"

With a joyful cry, his mother rushed to what she considered her restored child; and supported by her, with the aid of Edmund, he quitted the room, leaving me alone with the woman who called herself his wife, and who had cast a glance of malignant scorn on her victim as he solemnly renounced her for ever.

"I will be revenged!" she muttered. "I will bring down the pride of you all! I have money—thanks to you—and I will spend every shilling of it to gain possession of that poor wretch! He is my husband, and the law will give me power over him. Don't

believe I am to be foiled in anything I am determined to succeed in. Why! the poor fool implored me to be his wife! and the promise that I would become so, was the bait which drew him back from Canada. You find no flaw in that paper you have been studying these last ten minutes, and which I will trouble you to return to me. If you particularly wish for it, you can get a copy by sending five shillings to the clerk of St. James's Church!"

Without speaking, I returned it to her, and, as she took it, she said—

"I have not yet shot all the arrows out of my quiver. You will suffer, when you least expect it, for daring to resist me!"

She left the room immediately after those words; and without stopping to reflect on the threat contained in them, I went directly to my brother's room.

## CHAPTER XII.

THE hopes my mother entertained that the shock sustained by Henry — on the night Hannah had forced herself into his presence —would ultimately prove beneficial to his intellect, were destined to be disappointed.

He slept heavily all through the night, and far into the following day, but when he awoke no evidence remained of his temporary return to consciousness.

Edmund went to London for the purpose of acquainting Gerald with this new calamity, as well as to discover whether the statement of the woman concerning the marriage was to be credited. If it should prove correct, he was to consult Cuthbert as to the power she possessed of removing him from his family.

Mr. Hurst remained with us during Edmund's absence; and, by his advice, I communicated to my mother all the circumstances connected with my intercourse with Hannah.

When I had concluded, I humbly entreated her forgiveness for concealing them so long from her knowledge. Instead of reproving me, as I feared, she thanked me for the affectionate solicitude which had dictated my silence.

"Yesterday, Nelly," she said, mournfully, "my most fervent prayer was for Henry's restoration to reason; and I was enabled to bear with fortitude my interview with her whose wickedness has deprived him of it; because, in the midst of that frightful scene, I remembered I had heard any sudden emotion, which recalled past events to his memory, might have the effect of restoring my unhappy boy's intellect. That hope is proved to be fallacious. Nor do I wish it otherwise, for his recovery might only prove the harbinger of fresh woes. He might again leave us, and become the slave and dupe of the vile

creature whom, I fear, I shall have to consider as his wife!"

When I acquainted Mr. Hurst with all the particulars relative to the will I had given Hannah, he blamed me for undertaking such a responsibility unknown to her mother, and endeavoured to alleviate the mischief by consulting Mr. Sanders on the subject. The farmer had made a will later than the one I had taken charge of, and he considered the earlier one would be wholly valueless to dispossess the mother.

His surmises were correct. That I had taken from the bureau was made several years before his death, and was superseded by the one under which Mrs. Locksley had taken possession of the property.

Mr. Sanders had informed both mother and daughter of this circumstance, and the rage of the latter he described as something terrible to witness; but it was sobered by the mother's refusing to listen to Mr. Sanders on the subject.

The will I had given to her daughter was

the one her father wished should take effect, and his wishes were to her a sacred law. She not only refused to consider herself the owner of the property, but when her daughter discovered that her mother's resignation of it did not give herself a legal right to dispose of it, she willingly consented to transfer it to her by deed of gift, and thus enable her to do so.

I was very grieved at this, and thought, with remorseful feelings, that my own pliability of character had been the cause of this great wrong. If the will had been discovered in the bureau, out of which I had taken it, Mrs. Locksley would not have known her father wished it to be considered as his last, and thus would not have deemed it incumbent on her conscience to resign her birthright to her wicked daughter.

Cuthbert accompanied Edmund when he returned to Brookfields. He had been to the church at which Hannah Locksley said the marriage had taken place, and discovered that her statement was true, as Edmund had

recognised his brother's signature in the register.

He had, therefore, come to us for the purpose of seeing what terms his degraded wife would accept for leaving him in our charge.

His arrival was a great solace to all of us. My mother gathered courage from his presence, and suffered Henry—who had been a prisoner to his own room since the night when she we must now call his wife had appeared among us—to venture out and breathe the fresh air, guarded by Edmund and his friend.

Cuthbert's conduct to myself, during the few days he was with us, was that of the kindest brother: he never alluded to our short love story. But I felt he was firm as ever in his determination not to consider our engagement as dissolved.

Accompanied by Edmund, he had sought an interview with Hannah; and, after a stormy discussion—for at first she had insisted on her husband being restored to her—she consented never to seek him, or in any way to annoy any part of his family, on the conditions that

she was recognised as his wife—that every week she should receive a letter from my mother, brother, or myself, couched in terms of equality, and addressed to her as Mrs. Henry Travers; the letter to contain intelligence of her husband's condition during the week. And that my mother should likewise agree to allow her one hundred a year as long as he lived.

Thankful to be relieved, even on these degrading terms, from all further personal communication with her, we acceded to them; and it was arranged that Edmund, so long as he remained in Brookfields, should carry on this hateful correspondence.

"Good bye," Nelly," whispered Cuthbert, the morning he departed; "keep a brave heart, and all will be well. The engagement you wish broken is the spur to all my exertions, and I feel confident I shall be able to claim the prize which is to be the reward of my labours."

Hannah did not attempt to break through the terms of the agreement. Nor could I hear she made any efforts to dispose of the

farm, as I had hoped; she had apparently set up her resting-place there, and seemed delighted at astonishing her former companions with her wealth, and title to consideration as the wife of my brother. But her presence in the village had the effect of keeping me a prisoner, as I dreaded to leave the house, lest I should encounter her.

My horror of the daughter did not prevent my making frequent and anxious inquiries after the welfare of the mother. For some time after Hannah's return, I used to see the poor woman constantly at church on the Sabbath, but for some weeks I missed her from her accustomed place, and heard to my great distress that she was too ill to leave the house, and that her daughter had sent to London for some person to attend on her. Hannah Locksley was a proof of the truism that "Nothing is so successful as success." Her past errors were forgotten, now that she was the owner of the farm, and the large amount of money with which popular belief had invested her grandfather, her elegant attire, handsome person, and reputed riches,

all made her an object of admiration to many in her native village, who would have condemned and despised her, had she appeared the poor penitent her mother's imagination had pictured.

Neither praise nor pity was awarded to her who had given up the inheritance she was legally justified in retaining. The admirers of the daughter were ignorant of the subtleties of the law. A man's will should give his money to those he wished to possess it, and she would have acted unjustly who would have refused to surrender it to the person he really intended to have it, though the claim might not be a legal one.

I do not know how far the worshippers of this theory might have carried it practically into use, had they had an opportunity of exercising it, but it rose suddenly into popularity in the person of Hannah Locksley; and while the mother, sick and dependant, was neglected, the daughter was courted and sought after by those who once held themselves in a much higher rank of life.

All this gossip was conveyed to me by

Martha, together with the information that she was absent from the farm for weeks together, and when I knew this was the case, I walked freely in the village, which I never ventured to enter when I stood in dread of coming into collision with her.

Two years passed, and made but little alteration in our family, with the exception of Edmund's departure for Oxford. Louis Stainton was the friend to whom we were indebted for the means for his going there.

He had been for more than a twelvemonth the husband of Maude Headley. And when they had visited Brookfields, on their return from their wedding tour, they had both entreated my mother, as a proof of her regard, to allow Louis to defray Edmund's expences during the time he was at the University, stating that he would willingly receive it back by instalments as soon as he was in a position to defray the debt in that manner.

Edmund had a hard struggle with pride before he could be induced to accept this offer; and it was only his mother's assurance that she should feel it a concession to her

own wishes that he at last consented to do so. "It will not be very long," she had said, "before you will be able to repay the loan advanced by this true friend."

Maude was the same gay, light-hearted creature as ever; and what both surprised and amused me, she continued to delude her husband with the idea that she had become his wife merely because she pitied his isolated condition. He gravely confided to me his conviction, that his wife had some difficulty in overcoming her repugnance to his character, and that he could never be sufficiently grateful for her doing so. He uttered a remark of a similar character when his wife was present, and I could with difficulty conceal my amusement, as Maude, with a comical look, told him I was perfectly aware of the feelings she once entertained for him.

"My dear, it keeps the man humble and grateful," she had said, when I asked her if it was always her intention to keep her husband in ignorance of her affection.

"If he is so stupid as not to discover it by the way I behave to him, let him live and die

in his delusion. I don't wish the tables turned, I assure you. Men are the vainest animals in creation, and if Louis has not exhibited his share of it as yet, I don't intend to drag it forward to my own mortification."

Another request of Louis's my mother refused to comply with. It was, that we should leave Brookfields, and take possession of the apartments he formerly occupied at Baymouth.

Esther and Gerald likewise intreated her to do so. The plan presented such numerous advantages, that all her friends considered she was hardly justified in declining it.

It would remove us from the vicinity of Hannah, place us with kind and sympathising friends, and be the means of lessening our expences, a consideration of great importance to our now scanty means.

All these advantages did not weigh with my mother; she refused to listen to the proposition. She must not, she said, incur fresh obligations. The society of Mr. and Mrs. Hurst more than compensated for the occa-

sional glimpses we obtained of the owner of the farm.

I think my mother's strongest objection arose from the fear that I should suffer from too frequent intercourse with Cuthbert Headley. I had told her of my endeavours to persuade him to cancel our engagement, on the plea that henceforth my life would be devoted to assisting her in attending on Henry.

She did not for a moment dispute the justness of my decision.

"You are one of those, Nelly, born for the sacrifice of your own happiness, in order you may contribute to that of others. You will have, I fear, a grievous charge, which may end only with your life; and it is one impossible to carry into the home of a husband. I mourn that your prospect of felicity was so soon snatched from you, but I do not fear it will long prove a source of bitterness to you. It is the otherwise unoccupied mind that suffers from what is called a 'disappointment in love.' You, my dear child, say you always go to Shakespeare for the illustration

of an idea. I will for once follow your example, and remind you of the words of the County Paris—

'For Venus smiles not in a house of tears.'

"I cannot be grateful enough that my little Nelly's heart was only touched instead of wounded, that fancy had hardly given place to affection."

I did not let my mother know that my feelings towards Cuthbert were different to those she imagined. It would neither have altered my fate nor my resolution. I only grieved that he should persist in building hopes that could never be realised, and thought I could be more reconciled to my own lot if he would abandon his love for me, and bestow it on one who could accept it without sacrifice of duty.

Soon all these thoughts were banished from my heart. Love of such a nature had indeed no power to dwell in a house of tears. I had for some time past had a vague apprehension on account of my mother's health. The shock attending the discovery of my brother at the cottage of the Simpsons,

though it had given her temporary strength, had inflicted a blow to her delicate frame from which it had never wholly recovered. And since the night on which she had beheld Hannah Locksley, and heard her claims on my brother, she had become perceptibly more feeble, although her strong affection for him enabled her to be, as before, his incessant and vigilant guardian.

A severe cold, caught in walking with him in the garden one day in March, confined her to her room for several days, and during this time she had given the sole charge of Henry to myself. I had hardly, therefore, seen her during the time this indisposition lasted, and when she again made her appearance amongst us, I was startled and alarmed by the alteration these few days had occasioned in her appearance.

In vain I hoped that as the weather became warmer her cough would moderate, and her strength return. I wrote to Gerald to come, and visit her professionally—he had saved my sister, he would be able to benefit my mother. I would not, even in my thoughts, give utter-

ance to the fear I felt was always lurking in my heart. My mother must not die—God would spare me that greatest of all earthly bereavements—I should not be parted from her while in the course of nature there should be years of life before her.

Gerald came, and with him a physician of eminence. This time I was allowed to remain in the room while they were engaged in deciding whether they were to pass the sentence of life or death on a parent.

It was death! No hope, not the faintest glimmer of that blessed word was mine! My mother must die, and a few weeks at most was all that remained to her of earthly joys or woes.

I was not now the impatient child, who gave free expression to my grief. I heard the words, which I considered doomed me to a life-long misery, with calmness, but it was with the calmness of despair; I did not dare, by lamentation, to disturb the serenity with which my mother herself received her death warrant. It was to her only a passport from death unto life—the exchange of the sorrow

which endureth for a night, to the joy which lasteth for eternity.

The end arrived even sooner than I had been taught to anticipate.

The anxieties of the last few years had taken away the strength which might, for a short time longer, have defied death; the little that remained was so soon exhausted, that she was not able to converse with her sorrowing children for more than a few minutes at a time; but though unable to express her love in words, she each day committed to writing assurances she knew would comfort them, when they would no longer have her amongst them.

Poor Henry used to pass hours in her room, looking at her with a kind of gentle wonder, when she would put away with a smile and quivering lip the toys he had placed on her bed, when she was no longer able to arrange them for him. He was her last earthly care, and the last word she uttered was his name.

With the usual jealousy of my nature, I could not endure that any other but myself

should attend on this beloved and patient sufferer.

For the last three weeks of her existence, I insisted on having the sole charge of her at night, and felt almost a sensation of pleasure as I closed the door on the last lingerer in the room, and knew that no other hand than mine would minister to her for hours, and no other voice fall on her ear than my own.

On one of these miserable yet happy nights, she held my hand in hers, while she thanked me for the love and duty she said I had ever shown her. "I do not know, Nelly, what I ever did to deserve it from you. It must have been given solely because I was your mother, and a most selfish and exacting one I fear I have ever proved to you; but, dear, I value it in this hour above all else. I leave you a heavy charge. I exact no promise that you will accept it, for I know you will. The blessing of your dying mother will be your reward, and for a life of self-denial do not fear that God will support and comfort one who has ever been to others 'a very present help in time of trouble.' "

That night the spirit of my mother departed from earth to heaven. And even at that painful moment, I felt happy that I alone had heard her last words—had pressed the last kiss on her living lips.

As I did so, I registered in my heart a vow, that I would dedicate myself to the charge bequeathed me, that henceforward my hopes, joys, and fears should be bound up in the life of my eldest brother.

## CHAPTER XIII.

My mother's death necessarily made a great change in my mode of life. The remaining portion of the money my father had left was divided equally between her five children. To my two younger brothers it proved sufficient to launch them in the paths of life they had chosen.

I now knew the meaning of her words when she said that Edmund would not remain long in the debt of Louis Stainton.

Gerald and Esther pressed me affectionately to receive the amount of interest their share of the money yielded, to contribute to the support of Henry and myself, but I resolutely refused the offer. The hundred a year we had bound ourselves to pay his wife during

his lifetime, was a heavy charge on our straightened resources, but I determined I would make the remainder suffice, and for that purpose resolved to leave Brookfields, and find a home more suited to our means, as soon as the twelvemonth had expired for which we were compelled to retain the house.

Mrs. Headley and Louis renewed the offer of the apartments in Baymouth House, but with feelings of natural delicacy I shrank from placing myself in a position where I was frequently liable to meet Cuthbert, who could be to me, for the future, nothing but a friend.

He had, during the last few years, prospered in his profession beyond his most sanguine expectations. One of what he called "Fortune's lucky hits" had fallen to his share. The sudden indisposition of an eminent counsel had given him the opportunity of distinguishing himself, and from that time his practice increased with rapidity.

Six months after my mother's death he had visited me for the purpose of asking me to fulfil the engagement entered into with

such rash haste on the Baymouth Downs, but I was firm in my resolution of considering it broken for ever.

When compelled to believe that I was inflexible, he reproached me in a passionate manner for what he called my obduracy, and declared I could never really have cared for him.

"It is a pitiful reason, Nelly, that you give to excuse your faithlessness; if you loved me, you would not refuse to give me the right to watch with you over your unfortunate brother. Do you doubt that I should consider him as mine also? that I should not love him for your sake, and you all the more, if it were possible, for your noble devotion to him? Oh! Nelly, is happiness of such common growth—have you ever gathered such a harvest of it yourself, that you ruthlessly throw it from you?—that you without regret remove it from my path for ever? Does your duty to Henry, your love to the memory of your mother, enjoin this on you? Think, if you really care for me, of the wretchedness to which you condemn us both! You take

from me all motive for honourable exertion, all hope for the future, while your own heart, like an untended garden, will become choked with useless weeds, instead of bringing forth fruits to brighten and gladden the hearts of those who love you."

I bore his reproaches patiently, and did not attempt to exculpate myself. I believed that, in his calmer moments, he would exonerate me from the charge of indifference he had brought against me.

Had I not given the promise to my mother, that I would devote my life to the trust she left me, I should have acted in the same way to Cuthbert. It was not right to carry a divided interest into the home of a husband, and although I knew that he would cheerfully have admitted Henry's claim on my love, that was no reason for defrauding him of half the duty of a wife.

As the time drew near when I was to quit Brookfields, I became aware it would give me more pain than I had imagined, to leave the friends I possessed there. The loss of the society of Mr. and Mrs. Hurst would be

a heavy one, and there were, besides, many others I should regret leaving; amongst the number was Mrs. Locksley, who, when her daughter was absent, would come and spend days together with Martha.

The home I had selected, and which I thought in all human probability I should never quit, was a very humble cottage, in a village distant about twenty miles from Baymouth. It was on the coast, and on that account I had chosen such a locality, sea bathing having been prescribed for my brother. Martha, with a love as true as if she had been the mother of those she had nursed from infancy, refused to leave me, and reside with Esther, as I wished her.

I had no means of repaying her devotion, and if she continued with me, she would be compelled to perform the most menial offices, my narrow means not allowing me to keep any other domestic. All these things weighed not a grain with her; I was her especial favourite, and as long as she lived, she would never of her own will be separated from me.

Her affection was a comfort I was thankful

to possess, and I could bear cheerfully the inconvenience attending a poor home and scanty income, if the one was brightened by her presence, the other regulated by her wise economy.

We had yet three weeks to spend at Brookfields, when one afternoon I received a message from Mrs. Locksley, imploring me to see her if possible that day, as she had something very urgent to impart to me, and was too unwell to leave her home. The little messenger likewise said Mrs. Henry Travers was gone out for the evening, and if I could please come at once, Mrs. Locksley would be thankful.

I was surprised that she should make such a request. I had never entered the house since the day of her daughter's return to it, and I could not think of doing so now without repugnance. Still, unwilling to hurt the feelings of the good woman, I told the little maid I would quickly follow her to the farm. I felt, too, almost sure that no trifling circumstance could have induced her to send for

me, and though very disagreeable to myself, I complied at once with the request.

When I reached the farm I was glad to find Mrs. Locksley was not suffering from severe indisposition, though not well enough to quit the house. She was seated by the fire, facing the spot where her father's chair had formerly stood, but all was now altered in the arrangement of the room, the daughter appearing as anxious to erase all traces of the old farmer's peculiarities, as the mother had been to retain them.

The communication Mrs. Locksley made to me caused me surprise, which at first was mingled with a slight degree of fear, but that speedily disappeared, and I could only wonder the good sense of the narrator should have considered it necessary to have sent for me for the purpose of relating it.

It was to the effect that her little maid had brought her from the village the news that a man dressed as a sailor had been for some days past loitering at the small inn in the place, and that his only object seemed to

be to ascertain all the particulars he could glean connected with myself and family.

"You are so lonely at Oakdens, Miss Ellen," continued my anxious informant, "that I thought you ought to have some man in the house at night while you remain there, and I have spoken to James Standen, who you know is the son of Mrs. Standen, at the post office, and clerk to Mr. Sanders, and asked him to apply to you for permission to sleep at your house during the next three weeks, but I thought it better to tell you the reason before he did so. I don't wish to alarm you, but, indeed, I don't like the reports I hear of this strange man."

I told my friend that I considered her solicitude on my account wholly misplaced; that I was unacquainted with any person who wore such a dress as she described, unless it were the fisherman at Baymouth, from whom I had certainly no reason to anticipate evil, but as that assurance did not succeed in removing her fears, I consented to have the house protected at night by the formidable champion she had provided for me, and that

point conceded, I made inquiries concerning her own welfare.

Mrs. Locksley never made any complaints respecting the manner in which she was treated by her daughter, but I knew that the poor woman's life was passed in constant sorrow. Sometimes Hannah would leave the farm for weeks together, and suddenly return when least expected. She had now remained quietly at home for a longer time than customary, and had mixed more of late in such society as the village afforded. My fears respecting her returning while I remained with her mother, were set at rest by the assurance that she would be absent till nine or ten o'clock, and satisfied I ran no risk of encountering her, I did not hurry to leave her mother.

While we were quietly conversing, a knock at the outer door sent the little attendant to see who claimed admission. As soon as the child opened the door, we heard a man's voice inquiring for the "mistress," and the next instant his footsteps were heard approaching the door. I had risen with cheeks

blanched with terror at the few words he uttered, and when Jasper Coxe entered the kitchen, ragged, dirty, and evidently half intoxicated, I clung to the frightened woman by whose side I stood as if she could protect me from the insolence of the brutalized wretch who staggered to the place where terrified we awaited his approach.

"Well," cried he, "this is what I call two pieces of good luck in one day. I have only just found out that the rich lady who calls herself Mrs. Henry Travers, is my old sweetheart, and when I come to see her, I find my charming little Nelly. I suppose you are good friends with Hannah, now you are sisters."

Mrs. Locksley's courage rose at the insolence of this speech, and she answered:

"My daughter is not at home, and I am quite sure will not wish to see you here when she returns. I must insist on your leaving the house directly."

"Must you," said the wretch, composedly seating himself, "you'll soon find out your mistake. It is not I who'll leave the house to-day. You'll very soon perceive who has

the power to order people away. I have heard all about Hannah in the village, and of the lots of money the old man left her, as well as what she gets from her husband's relations—her husband's relations," repeated he, with a chuckling laugh. "Oh, Lord! Lord! what a humbug this girl is. However, no matter where the tin comes from, I am here to have my share of it, and I will. As long as it's Hannah's house, it's mine, and as I don't like to see old women about me, I'll trouble you to toddle as soon as convenient; the sooner the better if you'll leave Hannah's new sister behind you."

"I must go," whispered I, to the frightened woman, "I cannot remain in this man's company; I will send some one to stay with you, but let me go—pray don't detain me."

The poor creature still held me, and muttered:

"For God's sake do not leave me alone in the power of this man; he will kill me before you can send anyone to me."

Compassion proved stronger than fear, and I consented to stay with her, on condition

that I was allowed to send Polly for her daughter.

During the short time this conversation lasted, he eyed us curiously, and when I attempted to leave the kitchen, placed himself in my path.

"I will have no one leave the house but the old woman," said he, impudently. "If you go, I'll go with you; it won't be the first time we have had a country walk together."

"I do not intend to quit the house," said I, firmly; "but Mrs. Locksley requires assistance, and I am going to seek the girl who attends on her."

God forgive me for the equivocation of that reply, but I feared if he thought the assistance she required was the presence of her daughter, he might prevent my sending for her. He suffered me to pass out of the kitchen, and when I had found the child, I inquired if she knew where her mistress was. To my delight, I heard she was at a farmer's, not more than a quarter of a mile from the farm, and telling the girl to say nothing more than that she must return immediately,

I softly opened the back door, and watched her quick flight down the road.

Fearful if I remained long from the room the wretch might seek me, I returned and took my place by the side of Mrs. Locksley. The man had fallen into a doze during the short time I had been from the room, from which my entrance did not rouse him; and the poor woman and myself sat side by side with clasped hands, counting the minutes as they passed, and dreading that the loud ticking of the once-valued clock, would wake him from his drunken slumber.

Had any one told me when I rose that morning that I should before the day closed be waiting in Hannah Locksley's house, impatiently longing for her appearance, I should have deemed it a thing impossible to occur. Yet now, with beating heart, I listened for the first sound of her footsteps as if it was the thing on earth I most desired to hear.

It was more than half an hour after I had despatched my little messenger before her mistress entered the room, with flushed face and angry look.

"Now, mother," she commenced, in a stern voice, "what fool's whim is this you have taken into your head. Is it to welcome my dear sister Nelly you have sent for me?"

"I sent for you," answered I, fearlessly, "because I was afraid to leave your mother unprotected in the power of that man. Now that her safety is secured by your presence, I will leave her."

Hannah had not observed that Jasper Coxe was in the room till I directed her attention to him. He had started from his slumber at the noise of her entrance, and now seemed endeavouring to shake off the effects of the stimulants he had swallowed. Apparently, the rest he had taken had, to some extent, sobered him, for he said, in a much quieter tone than he had previously used—

"Yes, Hannah, I am here to live respectably at home with you for the rest of my days."

"Hold your tongue, you fool," replied she, scornfully, "you will get nothing out of me by your swaggering tricks!"

"Then I'll have all you have got without my swaggering!" answered he, his passions roused by the contempt with which she had replied to his greeting. "Do you think you can play fast and loose with me? Why, before I came here I found out all your concerns, and now I intend to be master in my own house. You may call yourself by any name you like, if you can get anything by it; but since you provoke me with your sneering tongue, I'll tell the truth whether you like it or not. You were my wife long before you trapped Henry into the belief that he was your husband! Don't suppose, my dear"—he added, in a jeering voice—"that I should have hunted you up for love! No, no; you know better than that! But you are rolling in money—my money—and I am come for it! So now shake hands and be friends, if you like. If not, take yourself off with the old woman—I don't care what becomes of you, now I have got such snug quarters for the rest of my life!"

Hannah seized the heavy poker which stood by the side of the chimney, and, with a cry

like that of an infuriated animal, rushed towards the man who had defied her. He stepped quickly aside to evade the blow, and the unfortunate woman, coming into contact with the chair from which he had started, fell heavily on the brick floor.

Completely sobered by the sight, Jasper stooped to raise her, and, as he did so, uttered a cry of horror: she had either wounded herself severely by the violence with which she had fallen, or the vehemence of her passion had caused her to burst a blood-vessel. When lifted from the ground, and placed in a chair, she was, to all appearance, dead, while the front of her dress was dyed in blood.

The wild despair of the unhappy mother at this sight was terrible to witness; while even the hardened man, whose presence had occasioned the calamity, was evidently deeply affected.

"It was no fault of mine," he said, in a voice of unfeigned sorrow; "poor wench! I never hurt a hair of her head in my life. But," added he, with a sudden start, "she

mayn't be dead after all. I'll run for a doctor!"

And he immediately darted from the place.

I remained with the miserable parent, aiding her to wipe the blood as it welled from the lips of the wretched girl, for it was soon evident that it flowed from no external injury.

Jasper quickly returned with Mr. Neave, who comforted the mother by the assurance that her daughter was not dead—might possibly even be restored to health.

"You can be of little use," said he to me, as I stood by his side, eager to render assistance, "but if you will go home and send your nurse, she will prove invaluable both to mother and daughter."

Thankful to quit a scene of horror, in which I could be of little service, I hastened to follow the advice of the surgeon, and send Martha to the farm. In a few hours, I heard from her that all immediate danger to the life of Hannah was past; although there appeared but little prospect of her ultimate restoration, Mr. Neave considered it pro-

bable she might continue to live for some months.

Jasper, I heard, was still at the farm; and that the terrible catastrophe, occasioned by his unexpected arrival, had produced the effect of rendering him quiet and humble.

Now that the first shock of this event was passed, I could think of the importance the man's acknowledgment of Hannah as his wife, was to myself. It was a great blessing, even in the state Henry was now in, to know that he was free from such a degrading connexion; but there was another circumstance that was likewise of consequence to me, and which I did not think of till my brothers, in their answers to my letters, acquainted me with it. It was that, owing to this discovery, I was released from the payment of the hundred a year with which my mother had bribed Hannah to suffer us to remain in peace the guardians of my brother. It was given to her as his wife; and, consequently, she had no longer a claim to it.

This addition to my slender finances was of great importance to my comfort, and I

thought, with satisfaction, that it would be the means of lightening the labours which Martha had insisted on discharging.

The day preceding the one on which we were to quit Brookfields, Mr. Hurst informed me that Hannah earnestly entreated to see me, and I immediately consented to accompany him to the farm.

It was impossible, if I had not known that it was Hannah Locksley I beheld, that I could have recognised her in the deathlike form extended on the bed. She turned her large, dark eyes on my face with a look as if she implored the forgiveness she had not strength to solicit, and, for the moment, a faint hectic tinged the ashy cheek, as I took her hand, and expressed my sorrow at seeing her so ill.

"I do not deserve you should come to me," she answered in a faint voice. "I have sinned greatly against many; but you and yours I have injured most of all. Can you forgive a dying woman for the evils she has inflicted on you?"

My heart was filled with compassion as I

looked on this miserable victim of her own ungovernable passions, and I assured her that I forgave her sincerely, and hoped she would be restored to health, to prove her penitence by love and duty towards her mother.

She shook her head as she said,

"I have done with life, and so best; at this moment I repent sincerely of my past sins; but God, who knows all hearts, can alone tell how I might employ my time if he permitted me to rise from this bed with strength, again to enter into temptation. Mother would sooner place me in my coffin than see me leave her to rush into fresh guilt."

"I would," said the weeping mother, solemnly: "but, my child, I pray God you may be spared to prove your repentance by the way you used the life he vouchsafes to spare for a time."

I took farewell of her I had long considered my greatest foe, with my heart filled with sorrow for her mother, and compassion for herself; and the next morning left the place endeared to me by the recollection of

its being the scene of my sister's restoration, and the last resting-place of my beloved mother.

My brother Henry seemed pleased with the novelty attending his journey, and had never since his mother's death shown such interest in any occupation as in watching Martha arrange our new home. He would stand with a pleased look and hand the nails, while she, mounted on a chair, arranged bed furniture and window curtains, and showed the delight of a little child when her work was completed.

I was much happier now than during the time I remained in Brookfields after my mother's death. I could let Henry wander in the garden, and walk with him in the lanes and meadows in the neighbourhood of our cottage without the dread of meeting her whose sight might have destroyed him.

It was a pleasure to me, though a melancholy one, to see him follow Martha into the small poultry-yard, and take an interest in feeding its occupants; he would hunt for the eggs, and bring them with a look of childish

exultation to the kitchen, and occasionally amuse himself in digging in the small plot of ground which had been marked out as his garden. I was, however, compelled to deprive him of this source of enjoyment. Gerald, in one of his visits, had found him thus engaged, and told me that any unusual amount of exertion was likely to occasion the rupture of a vessel in his brain, which would cause instantaneous death.

For some time after this caution, I was haunted by the fears it had created. I had so wrapped up his life in my own, that the idea of their ever being severed, gave me exquisite pain; but I gradually forgot my apprehensions; as years went by and made not the slightest alteration in his condition. After a time I became happy and contented in my retirement; if I had no joys, I had few causes for anxiety. My future was mapped out clearly before me, and I saw year after year blotted out from it without regret.

It must not be supposed I was suffered to forget I had other ties in the world than those which bound me to L——. Esther,

Gerald, and their children always spent some weeks of each summer near me, and Maude and Louis never allowed three months to pass without visiting me. My brothers always insisted on passing their Christmas with "sister Nelly," and twice they were accompanied by Mr. and Mrs. Hurst, whose venerable mother had died the year after I had left Brookfields. Cuthbert I positively refused to see, although I could not prevent his sometimes writing to me.

From Mr. Hurst I learnt that a few months after Hannah's illness, her mother, by the advice of Mr. Neave, had let the farm, and departed with her daughter for Madeira, as the only means of prolonging her life; he told me, too, that she was a sincere penitent, willing to die, but, for her mother's sake, consenting to embrace the means which gave her a chance for life. Her husband went with them; and when I heard that during his wife's illness he had been a support and solace to her mother, kind and attentive to herself, and a diligent and humble pupil of Mr. Hurst's in acquiring Scripture knowledge, I

thought, with feelings of humility, on the rash judgments I had formerly passed on my brother, that I had once derided Esther for expressing hopes a sinner might be turned, by the grace of God, from the errors of his youth.

I may as well say here all I ever more heard of Hannah and her husband. She lived for three years after her arrival at Madeira, and died in humble hope that her sins were pardoned. Her mother returned to England a broken-hearted woman; but she lived for some years a life of benevolence, and spent in deeds of mercy the wealth her father had accumulated. Jasper never returned; he became a convert to the Roman Catholic faith, and a member of one of the monasteries in the island.

The seventh Christmas I had passed at L—— had arrived, and Walter and Edmund were with me as usual. Henry always betrayed great satisfaction at the visits of his brothers, and at this particular time was much more excited and pleased than usual. He had accompanied them during the morn-

ing to a large sheet of water, a short distance from our home, and been a delighted spectator of their skating.

Once he had ventured on the ice, and, before they could reach him, had fallen on it with some violence; I could see that Walter looked alarmed as he told me of the accident, but this wore off to some extent as Henry did not exhibit any proof of his having suffered from it, further than that he appeared tired and inclined to sleep, and Walter insisted on his retiring early to rest in consequence; when he had seen him fall into a quiet slumber, he returned to Edmund and myself, greatly relieved from the apprehensions he had evidently felt respecting him. For a long time we sat that night talking of many things relative to the past, among the number, of my father's death.

"I believe, Nelly," said Edmund, "that Martha thinks to this day it was your tears which brought all that misery on us. To cry on a birthday, she considers the most unlucky thing a person can do. Have you ever wept on one since that day?"

"I don't know, Edmund. My tears have had occasion to fall too often for me to chronicle them."

"But your birthdays have not, Nelly."

"I don't know that, Edmund," said I, laughingly, "I am getting an old woman now. If I live till April, I shall be twenty-nine, and that is the last birthday a woman ever willingly alludes to."

"You don't look so old, Nelly. I don't see a bit of difference in you since you have been here. I wish you would make us all happy, and allow me the particular pleasure of reading the matrimonial service for Cuthbert and yourself."

"Do you think, most reverend brother, that a family can get on properly without an aunt in it, and Esther will never be that relative really to your children when they come. A married woman cannot be one in its true sense."

"I don't know what the better we were," said Walter, "for Miss Travers; celibacy did not soften her heart to her nephews and nieces. I believe we might all have starved

before she would have given us one of the ten thousand pounds she left behind her, to one as heartless as herself. I often think, Nelly, when I come here and see how cheerfully you live in this little hole, how much good they would have been to you."

"That I am cheerful, Walter, is a proof I do not want them. Let us only make up our minds to be contented with our lot, and we shall soon acquire a philosophic contempt for wealth."

This allusion of Walter's, to my father's only sister, was that, in consequence of her death four years previously, her property had been taken possession of by a person who had resided some years with her as companion. I did not participate in the bitterness which my brothers felt on the subject. It was right that one who had borne with her caprices, and ministered to her comfort, should be provided for, although I did not recognise the justice of the property being altogether alienated from our family.

Before Walter retired to his own room that night, he went to look at Henry. I

held the light while he examined the face which was reposing in what I considered tranquil sleep, till I saw him with an alarmed look place his fingers on the pulse of the slumberer. It was indeed sleep! sleep from which in this world he would never awaken. He had died without a struggle, and with a smile on the face that recalled the image of my lost brother in happier days. And as I gazed I humbly dared to hope that his spirit purified in the sight of God by the sufferings he had passed through, had rejoined the beloved parent whose latest thoughts had been of this dear and erring child.

I have little more to write. The days of my youth were passed—the heavy trials of my life ended—ended with that of my brother. I left L—— after that event, and for some months remained with Esther, now the mother of five children. But when the summer was over, Maude claimed me as her guest, and when I left her, it was once more as the affianced wife of Cuthbert Headley.

Our marriage was to take place on the first day of the new year, and Christmas day

found all I loved on earth assembled in the old house at Baymouth.

That evening we talked much and earnestly of him who had been removed suddenly from us that day twelvemonths.

"Henry's career," said Gerald, "was a proof of the wisdom of Him who wrote, 'That to be weak is to be miserable.' Remember that, my boy," and so saying, he placed his hand on the head of his eldest son, a child of eight years old, who for the last few minutes had been looking curiously at our sad faces.

"Then!" exclaimed the boy, triumphantly; "I shall always be happy, for when I threw down the nursery table this morning, Martha said I was as strong as a young elephant."

This literal rendering of the maxim broke up our conference; and I believe induced Gerald to believe his son had displayed extraordinary intelligence in making the remark.

I have now been for five years the wife of Cuthbert Headley, and as I look back on the miseries I suffered in my youth, and re-

member they were occasioned by the errors of one who had not strength to resist temptation, I offer up a prayer to God, that the son he has given me, may early learn, that if he transgresses, he will likewise suffer; that though he may succeed for a time in concealing his guilt from those in whose estimation he may wish to stand highly, yet he may be sure that even in this life

"His sin will find him out."

THE END.

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